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‘With heart and voice ever devoted to the cause’: Women in the Gaelic Movement, 1886–1914

Priscilla Scott

**Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy**

University of Edinburgh

2013



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ABBREVIATIONS

NLS	National Library of Scotland
<i>AG</i>	<i>An Gaidheal</i>
<i>CMJ</i>	<i>Caledonian Medical Journal</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>The Celtic Review</i>
<i>DG</i>	<i>An Deo-G(h)réine</i>
<i>GB</i>	<i>Guth na Bliadhna</i>
<i>JFFS</i>	<i>Journal of the Folk-Song Society</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oban Times</i>
<i>OWN</i>	<i>Oban Weekly News</i>
<i>SGS</i>	<i>Scottish Gaelic Studies</i>
<i>TGSI</i>	<i>Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness</i>

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ABSTRACT

The Gaelic movement was the general term used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to refer to a range of diverse but interconnected activity in support of the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland, embracing educational, literary, musical and scholarly aspects. Accounts of the Gaelic cultural landscape at this time tend to focus on the leading male figures; the presence and participation of women has been largely overlooked and a number of women who were prominent and significant participants in the Gaelic movement have slipped into the shadows or disappeared completely. This study aims to reconfigure this view to foreground the contribution of women and to understand the complex dynamics of the Gaelic movement from the perspectives of the women involved. While the study importantly highlights certain individual women, the biographical focus is used as a means to uncover lesser-known women and the female friendships and networks in which they moved, as well as to explore their relationship and interaction with prominent male figures and other interconnected social groupings within the Gaelic movement and wider Pan-Celtic and Celtic Revival circles. The study examines and discusses the participation, contribution and influence of a number of women across a spectrum of Gaelic cultural activities, taking into account socio-historical, literary and cultural aspects and using gender as an analytical lens through which to examine the different challenges and tensions that individual women negotiated in a period of social and cultural change.

The study shows that a number of women were actively involved with the Gaelic movement in the period between the passing of The Crofting Act and the start of the Great War; that they were innovative, ambitious and wide-ranging in their participation; and that they saw the accessibility of the Gaelic cultural sphere as an opportunity to progress both their individual aspirations as women as well as their support for the Gaelic language and culture.

1

Introduction: The Spirit of the Age

Mòr ged a bha na caochlaidhean a thàinig air a' Ghaidhealtachd ri linn Bliadhna Theàrlaich, agus a bha ciùrrail do 'n Ghàidhlig, gidheadh, cha robh iad ach faoin seach iadsan a tha air tighinn air Breatunn gu h-iomlan agus air an t-saoghal air fad anns an dà linn mu dheireadh seo. Tha an t-each-iaruinn, agus an dealanach air sréin aig a' chinne-dhaonna. Théidear gu iomallan an domhain na's usa an diugh na rachamaid roimhe seo á Ionbhar-nis do Lunnainn. Is urrainn duinn bruidhinn ri chéile gu socair aig astar ceud mìle. Theid fios do Astralia á Lunnainn ann an dà mhionaid an uaireadair. Tha, mar so, cur is gabhail eadar gach uile chinneach, agus gach eadar-dheallachadh a bha eatorra a' leaghadh gu bras air falbh. Tha so air atharrachadh mòr a thoirt air spiorad na h-aimsir.¹

In 1905 and looking back over the last two decades of the previous century, the Gaelic writer Katherine Whyte Grant, in the quotation above, sums up the 'spirit of the age' as one of dramatic change with new and remarkable developments in industry, transport and communication, and suggests the early beginnings of a global culture. As a woman, she might also have referred to the significant advances made in the second half of the nineteenth century in expanding opportunities for middle-class women in education, employment and civic society, although at this point in time at the start of a new century women were still some distance away from achieving the right to the parliamentary vote.² It would take another ten years of increasingly militant struggle and the hiatus of

¹ C. W. G[h]rannd, 'Na Cunnartan a tha Bagradh na Gàidhlig', *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 10–12 (11).

² It is important to note, however, that 'neither in the Edwardian or the Victorian period was the parliamentary vote the sole definite feature of feminist thinking or action'. See Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850–1900* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994), 157.

the First World War before voting rights were granted for a particular sector of the female population in 1918,³ and a further ten years before universal female franchise was finally attained in 1928. However, from the threshold of the new century, it could be recognised that women's lives had advanced considerably in a number of important ways. Although it was still the case that in all areas of their lives Victorian and Edwardian women had to conform to or confront gendered ideologies and prescriptive notions of what was 'appropriate' feminine activity or 'womanly' conduct, these definitions were being vigorously contested and debated as the nineteenth century drew to a close. The women who participated in the broad cultural arena of the Gaelic movement in Scotland in this period and who are at the centre of this study were to varying degrees influenced, empowered and challenged by the changing status of women and the instability of traditional gender boundaries.

The chapters that follow this one examine women's participation and influence in the Gaelic movement between 1886 and 1914, exploring the scope and significance of their contribution, and the different motivations, ideologies and perspectives that underpinned their engagement with the Gaelic language and culture. An important methodological approach will be to examine social networks and alliances in both a Gaelic and a pan-Celtic context, mapping channels of influence between like-minded women and between women of different social and cultural backgrounds, as well as the experiences of women alongside men and their negotiation of gendered relationships and hierarchies. That said, however, particular women emerge as prominent figures in every chapter, but in exploring their individual biographies it has been the intention to present them in the wider social circles and informal networks in which they interacted and where they found encouragement and support. In this way the study aims to provide a detailed and integrated account of women's involvement with the Gaelic movement in this period, where well-known personalities are put in new perspectives and lesser-known or forgotten figures are restored and reappraised.

³ In 1918 the vote was granted to all adult males, but limited in the case of women to those over thirty who were householders, wives of householders, university graduates or occupiers of property worth £5 per year.

The chronological boundaries of the study are marked by the passing of the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act in 1886 and the beginning of the Great War in 1914, the period in history referred to as the *fin de siècle*, and a time associated with technological innovation, industrialisation, rapid urbanisation, and the trajectory of tradition to modernity.⁴ The influence of this particular 'moment in time' will be discussed in this chapter in relation to the three main components of this study – women, Gaelic, and ideas of national and cultural identity. The first section comments on the Victorian domestic ideology of separate spheres, and on women's activism in the public domain, with particular focus on the women's suffrage movement; the second considers gender in relation to national and cultural identities; and the third outlines the specific Gaelic context of the late nineteenth century. In commenting on these three areas, selected relevant literature is considered and significant themes and discussion threads highlighted. The final section of the chapter defines the scope and structure of the study, and the sources and methodology are outlined.

Private and Public: Gender Ideology

Discussion of women in the Victorian period often highlights the ideology of separate spheres, with its gendered division of private and public roles for men and women. Queen Victoria, who came to the throne in 1837, and whose long reign gave the period its name, provided a very visible female role model of a loyal wife and mother, promoting an image of womanly virtue and modesty, although, paradoxically, also offering an example of a woman in a position of power.⁵ The feminine ideal underpinned by class and especially by religious values, was encapsulated in the patriarchal middle-class family, with husband as industrious breadwinner and wife as loyal supporter and devoted mother. However, as this was an ideal, the reality was often different, and increasingly throughout the nineteenth century middle-class women were

⁴ For an overview of these developments in Scotland, see the first chapter in Ewen A. Cameron, *Impaled upon a Thistle: Scotland since 1880* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). The complex relationship between women and modernity is discussed in Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁵ For discussions on the conflicting ideas of femininity represented by Queen Victoria see Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich, eds, *Remaking Queen Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

pioneering new opportunities for participation in public life.⁶ In addition, whether by circumstance or desire, many women did not marry, and were the ‘surplus’ or ‘redundant’ women who were trapped in the parental home with no particular family role.⁷ For those who had private means, philanthropy, often underpinned by a personal religious calling or a sense of class superiority, provided a seamless shift from private to public caring. For genteel women who were not provided for, the options were poorly paid positions as a governess, companion or seamstress. It is not surprising therefore that at mid-century it was predominantly single women who were leading efforts to redefine women’s roles in society.⁸

The domestic ideal, despite these challenges, continued to be a powerful force and many of the early advances made for women were argued and gained from a perspective that did not oppose traditional feminine roles.⁹ Some women saw the way forward as developing a public role within a sanctioned feminine sphere, while others campaigned for equality of opportunity. The two approaches have been identified as ‘a strategy of difference’ and ‘a strategy of equal rights’, although both perspectives could coexist within a particular group and also within the same individual.¹⁰ Some suffrage activists, for example, saw achieving the vote as fundamental to women being seen as equal to men, while others argued on the grounds that women’s virtuous influence was needed to clean up the political arena.¹¹ Many areas of Victorian discourse reinforced the differences in the constructs of femininity and masculinity, positing man to woman as a natural complementarity that maintained a harmonious social order.¹² Ideas of ‘natural’ difference also extended to the intellect, so that rational, incisive thought was recognised as a male characteristic while women were emotional, caring and compassionate, and thus by extension unsuited to the cut and thrust of public life.¹³ Any

⁶ See Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon, ‘Introduction’, in *Out of Bounds: Women in Scottish Society 1800–1945*, ed. by Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 1–9 (8).

⁷ Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 13.

⁸ For a succinct overview of the position of the single woman in society in this period, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women, Work and Community for Single Women 1850–1920* (London: Virago, 1985), particularly chapter 1, ‘The Revolt against Redundancy’.

⁹ See Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 13; Breitenbach and Gordon, ‘Introduction’, in Breitenbach and Gordon, *Out of Bounds*, 2–9; Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 16.

¹⁰ Ida Blom, ‘Gender and Nation in International Comparison’, in *Gendered Nations*, ed. by Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall, (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 3–26 (9).

¹¹ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women, Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999 [1987]), 153.

¹² Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 154.

¹³ See Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 12–15.

woman stepping outwith the boundary of the feminine ideal was exposed to the charge of unwomanly or, more directly, ‘manly’ behaviour, yet there were many willing to take this risk. Amongst all that was declared ‘new’ in the 1890s, and further unsettling the gender debate, was the fictional ‘New Woman’,¹⁴ often represented as a stereotype of the emancipated modern woman and seen by her detractors as posing the greatest threat to conventional womanhood through rejection of marriage and motherhood. However, to others she was a daringly modern role-model: ‘To her critics the modern woman was a symptom of the social decline she helped to precipitate (and after 1906 the militant [suffragettes] were often written about in this way); to her champions she was not unwomanly, but womanly in a new and developing way’.¹⁵

The contesting and reworking of the ideologies and rhetoric of gender and gendered spheres was an important dynamic in the *fin de siècle*. Lisa Tickner’s study – *The Spectacle of Women*¹⁶ – provides a vivid sense of this, not just through her detailed and illuminating discussion on the broad debates about definitions of femininity and women’s place in public life in the context of the women’s suffrage campaign at the start of the twentieth century, but also for the impressive range of visual images she has collected together that graphically illustrate how highly charged, wide-ranging and often conflicting these debates were. No study considering the public activity of women beyond the domestic sphere in the *fin de siècle* can ignore the gendered discourse and propaganda that was in circulation with regard to definitions of femininity and the ‘Woman Question’, and the challenge that stereotypical perceptions of the modern woman posed to any woman who, however modestly, was seeking a more independent role in society. It is a theme that weaves through all the chapters that follow, in particular with respect to the way women were received and judged in their participation in the Gaelic movement, and in seeking to understand how they were able to counter, divert or rework such prescriptive definitions.

¹⁴ For discussion of the ‘New Woman’ in a broad cultural context see Sally Ledger, *The New Woman, Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, eds, *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact, Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds, *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 192.

¹⁶ See footnote 11, above.

Women's Public Activism

An increasing amount of published research into women's lives in the Victorian period continues to prove the extent to which women were actively involved beyond the perceived 'woman's sphere' of home and domesticity. In the first half of the century middle-class women were to the fore in the anti-slavery and temperance movements, and as the century progressed they embraced a plethora of philanthropic and social initiatives, usually in connection with issues relating to other women, and often from a position of assumed class and moral superiority. In addition, women campaigned for and achieved significant legislative rights during the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain, although this did not happen in all parts of the country at the same time, nor did it always benefit women of all classes. In Scotland, from 1872, female rate-payers could vote and stand for election to school boards, and by 1892, women had gained access to all degrees at the four Scottish universities.¹⁷ Despite not having the parliamentary vote, women were active in political associations during the latter decades of the century; the Women's Liberal Association was formed in the 1870s and the Conservative Primrose League in 1883; while the Independent Labour Party, formed in 1893, was the only political party to admit women on the same terms as men.¹⁸ The motivation for women's activism varied according to social class, political allegiance and religious adherence, but throughout the century women of all classes were in different ways and to different degrees challenging gender restrictions that blocked their potential to participate in the public sphere.¹⁹

The women's suffrage movement was in its most active and public phase during the period between 1890 and 1914, and was therefore contemporaneous with the subject of this study, and is used here to highlight some common discussion threads. It is only comparatively recently that any attention has been paid to the Scottish dimension of the suffrage movement, a fact that Elspeth King described in

¹⁷ Note also the first Married Women's Property (Scotland) Act in 1877; Scottish women gained the municipal franchise in 1881 and could vote in county council elections from 1889. See Sue Innes and Jane Rendall, 'Women, Gender and Politics' in Abrams et al., *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, 44–83; Lindy Moore, 'Education and Learning' in *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, 111–139; Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, 142.

¹⁸ Catriona Burness, 'The Long Slow March: Scottish Women MPs, 1918–45', in Breitenbach and Gordon, *Out of Bounds*, 151–173; Gleadle, 161–162.

¹⁹ Breitenbach and Gordon, 'Introduction', in Breitenbach and Gordon, *Out of Bounds*, 1–9 (8).

1992 as ‘a historiographical scandal’.²⁰ This neglect has since been addressed by Elspeth King herself and also by Leah Leneman,²¹ as well as by Elizabeth Crawford’s *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866–1928*,²² and by a number of publications, lectures and events to mark the centenary of the historic suffrage parade and pageant that took place in Edinburgh in 1909. Kathryn Gleadle states that ‘generalisations concerning the nature of women’s lives mask significant and substantial regional variations [...] [as] becomes particularly apparent when the experiences of Irish, Scottish, Welsh and colonial women are taken into account.’²³ Research into the women’s suffrage movement in Scotland, Wales and Ireland has indeed shown this to be true, revealing significant national and indeed regional diversity,²⁴ highlighting for example, the use of national symbols, tales and rhetoric to garner support for the cause of women’s rights, and to challenge the Anglo-centric domination of the movement.²⁵ The London-based Cymric Suffrage Union emphasised their Welsh allegiance by wearing Welsh national costume, but also claiming an element of superiority through their Celtic heritage, referring to the ‘Celtic love of liberty’.²⁶ Similarly, Gwyneth Vaughan, a Welsh writer, cultural enthusiast,²⁷ and temperance and suffrage activist, claimed a more enlightened position for the Celtic/Welsh man in his attitudes to women: ‘I may be wrong, but I fancy the Saxon has not the courtesy of the Celt to women [...] we would very soon have equal political rights if it depended upon Wales’.²⁸ In Ireland, where female suffrage was frequently portrayed as something that would materialise in the wake of independence, a promise used to encourage women to focus on the nationalist

²⁰ Elspeth King, ‘The Scottish Women’s Suffrage Movement’, in Breitenbach and Gordon, *Out of Bounds*, 121–150 (122).

²¹ Leah Leneman, *A Guid Cause – The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1991).

²² Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (London: UCL Press, 1999). See also June Hannam, “‘I had not been to London’: Women’s Suffrage – a view from the regions’ in *Votes for Women*, ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 226–245.

²³ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, 5.

²⁴ See Hannam, “‘I had not been to London’”, in Purvis and Holton, *Votes for Women*, 226–245.

²⁵ Kirsti Bohata, “‘For Wales, see England?’ Suffrage and the New Woman in Wales’, *Women’s History Review*, 11 (2002), 643–656 (644).

²⁶ Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004), 43.

²⁷ See chapter 2, 32.

²⁸ Gwyneth Vaughan in *Christian Commonwealth*, 8 Feb 1990, quoted in Kay Cook and Neil Evans, “‘The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band’? The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1890–1918’, in *Our Mother’s Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History 1830–1939*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 159–188 (165).

cause,²⁹ the rhetoric of an enlightened national past also crops up: ‘The treatment of women in ancient Erin reveals a state of national mind and manners which is truly unique’.³⁰ Irish suffragists, who were often accused of campaigning for a vote that would be administered under English rule, were careful to accentuate their Irish identity when marching in England, wearing green dresses and carrying Irish flags.³¹ However, the conservative wing of the suffrage movement in England also recalled an imagined earlier ‘golden age’ for Anglo-Saxon women, promoting the pre-eminence of the ‘British freewoman’ in a racial hierarchy of women, and emphasising the female superiority of English/British women.³²

One of the arguments frequently used to oppose female suffrage was the perception that women were over-emotional and lacked the masculine quality of rational, intellectual thought.³³ This particular view was challenged, although not necessarily from a progressive gender perspective, by the Scottish nationalist and Gaelic activist, Ruairaidh Erskine of Marr (1869–1960), who claimed a gender-inclusive Gaelic history to support equal voting rights in his conception of an independent Scottish/Gaelic nation:

Nan d’ fhuair an Stàid Ghàidhealach cothrom tighinn gu àirde, bhiodh guth-taghaidh an cead gach neach, biodh ann fear no té, agus biodh an t-inbhe àrd no ìosal. Cha robh e mar àbhuist aig na Gàidheil a bhi ri tàir no dìmeas air boireannaich a chionn gu’m bu bhoireannaich iad. Bha iad a’ toirt dhaibh gach cothrom; agus cha robh e uair sam bith air a thilgeadh orra gu’n robh iad air an ais an reusan, an toinise, an tuigse no an comas-breathnachaidh.³⁴

He sets this liberal view in contrast to the British/English system where voting rights depended on the ability to pay rates, allowing him to make the partisan point that ‘na

²⁹ For this discussion see Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 70–75; 248–254.

³⁰ *United Irishman*, 10 Aug 1901, quoted in Frank A. Biletz, ‘Women and Irish-Ireland: The Domestic Nationalism of Mary Butler’, *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, 6 (2002), 59–72 (63).

³¹ Karen Steele, *Women, Press and Politics during the Irish Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 171.

³² The use of the rhetoric of national identity by the suffrage movement in England is discussed in Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘British Freewomen: National Identity, Constitutionalism and Languages of Race in early Suffrage Histories’ in *Radical Femininity: Women’s Self-representation in the Public Sphere*, ed. by Eileen Janes Yeo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 149–171. See also Jane Rendall, ‘Women and the Public Sphere’, *Gender & History*, 2 (1999), 475–488 (482).

³³ See this chapter, p. 4.

³⁴ A.M.E., ‘An Guth-Taghaidh agus An Duine’, *GB*, 10:2 (1913), 117–133 (117).

Sasunnaich' were incapable of rising above shilling and pounds. As will be noted in due course, however, Ruairaidh Erskine expressed opposition to women's involvement in the Gaelic movement and therefore his apparent support for female suffrage cannot be separated from his personal political perspective, and be seen as a rhetorical tool to emphasise difference and superiority from the dominant English position. Just as support for women's suffrage could be used for political expediency, the granting of the vote to women did not necessarily signify support for women's emancipation generally. As Rosemary Cullen Owens has noted with respect to the Irish Free State constitution of 1922, which granted the electoral franchise to all citizens who had reached the age of twenty-one: 'This was to be the last piece of progressive legislation affecting women for some fifty years'.³⁵

In Scotland, the first Suffrage societies were formed in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the 1860s, and by the end of the century the movement was canvassing in many Scottish towns, including those in the Highlands.³⁶ The *OT* reported meetings in Oban, Campbeltown, and Inverness, and in 1912, under the auspices of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 'largely attended' meetings were held at Bonar Bridge, Brora, Lairg, Helmsdale, and Golspie.³⁷ Amongst the Highland aristocracy, the most prominent supporter of women's suffrage was Lady Frances Balfour (1858–1931),³⁸ daughter of the eighth Duke of Argyll, who became a leader of the constitutional suffragists. Many women of her class were in the anti-suffrage camp, and therefore Frances Balfour courted class censure in taking the opposite view. She refers in her autobiography to the fact that: 'I can truly say that no-one in my social class had the least feeling for, or wish to know more about these unwomanly women'.³⁹ Professor John Stuart Blackie (1809–1895), a vocal enthusiast for Highland land reform, Gaelic, and home rule, was also a supporter of women's suffrage, alongside higher education for women, and his enlightened

³⁵ Rosemary Cullen Owens, 'Votes for Women', *Labour History News*, 9 (1993), 15–19, quoted in *The Irish Women's History Reader*, ed. by Alan Hayes and Diane Urquhart, (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 43.

³⁶ The Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage, founded in November 1867, was the first women's suffrage society in Scotland and one of the first three to be formed in Britain. See Innes and Rendall, 'Women, Gender and Politics', 60.

³⁷ *People's Journal*, 9 June 1912

³⁸ See Joan B. Huffman, 'Balfour [née Campbell], Lady Frances', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press [online edn, 2010]); also Leah Leneman, *The Scottish Suffragettes*, 32–33; Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 20.

³⁹ Lady Frances Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris: Dinna Forget*, 2 vols (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930), II, 127.

gender perspective can be seen in the support he gave to a number of women in the Gaelic movement, as will be discussed. The power of the vote had been clearly demonstrated in the Gàidhealtachd during the land struggle of the 1880s, when the extension of the male franchise in 1884 allowed crofters to access the democratic process,⁴⁰ enabling them to elect pro-crofter Members of Parliament and thus achieve some measure of success in their battle for the land. Whether this experience transferred to support for 'votes for women' is a subject outwith the particular focus of this study and needs to be considered as part of wider research into a Highland or Gaelic dimension to the campaign for women's suffrage.

The suffrage movement was an increasingly prominent example in the early years of the twentieth century of women publicly and forcibly contesting their restricted social and political position, and where 'stereotypes of conventional femininity were challenged and overturned'.⁴¹ The term 'suffragette' moved into general parlance in the period to identify any independent woman who was seen as being overly assertive, and as suffragette activism became more extreme it was used, positively or negatively, as an example of a campaigning strategy. When criticism was levelled at An Comunn Gàidhealach (The Gaelic Association) for its conservative approach to promoting the Gaelic cause, it was rebuffed with the words: 'Ciod e an còrr is urrainn an Comunn a dheanamh mur a tog e air sgrìob a thoirt gu Lunnainn agus coltach ris na *Suffragettes*, luchairt air choireigin a chur na teine'.⁴² On the other hand, when Mr Ronald Macinnes lectured the Gaelic Society of London on the subject of whether 'it [is] in the best interests of the Gaelic language that the movements for its revival should be associated with political agitations for economic reform' he suggested that: 'The Suffragettes have tried the Gaelic movement game of quiet waiting and working for years. They have thrown it up as useless, and now they battle for their aims and objects out in the open field, and Miss Pankhurst's proud boast to-day is how their power was felt at last election'.⁴³ The subject of female suffrage was debated in groups and societies, discussed in journalistic articles, and widely reported in the regional and national

⁴⁰ In Britain, men gained the franchise in stages according to economic means and in no nation except Finland were women enfranchised at the same time as men.

⁴¹ Sandra Stanley Holton, 'The Making of Suffrage History', in Purvis and Holton, *Votes for Women*, 13–33 (28).

⁴² 'Editorial', *DG*, 9 (1914), 145–147.

⁴³ Newspaper cutting from the *Highland News* (no date) in NLS Acc. 9736.

press, throughout the period this study is concerned with and therefore it has to be kept in view as a motivational influence for women, or as a positive or negative factor in the way they were represented or received in any form of public activity.

Women and the Nation

Nation building and an awareness of national identities were developing in different ways during the nineteenth century. The concept of the ‘nation’ as a collective people united by linguistic and various aspects of cultural affinity encouraged small-nation national revival movements that were often the first step to engaging with national or political autonomy. However, as Miroslav Hroch has shown, although the initial phase of most national movements in nineteenth-century Europe had similar characteristics, this did not always progress to an organised social or political movement.⁴⁴ While those who supported and were active in the Gaelic movement identified with the Gaelic language and culture from various subjective perspectives, understanding the relationship in terms of a Gaelic community and solidarity, this sentiment was in most cases independent of any national politics, and not incompatible with a wider Scottish, British, and indeed Imperial identity.

A number of scholars have suggested parallels between feminism and nationalism, particularly with reference to a similar emancipatory struggle, and many scholars have highlighted and discussed the gendered construction of the nation-building process.⁴⁵ As indicated already, national and gender ideologies were closely intertwined in campaigns for women’s suffrage.⁴⁶ In particular, an understanding of gender as ‘different but complementary’ encouraged the idea that women would not need the same rights as men. Just as essentialist notions of male and female natures

⁴⁴ See Miroslav Hroch, ‘From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe’, in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. by Gopal Balakrishnan (London & New York: Verso, 2012 [1996]), 78–97.

⁴⁵ See Sylvia Walby, ‘Woman and Nation’, in Balakrishnan, *Mapping the Nation*, 235–254; Ida Blom, ‘Nationalism and Feminism in Europe’, in *The European Way: European Societies in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. by Hartmut Kaelble (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 205–225; Blom, Hagemann and Hall, *Gendered Nations*; Tricia Cusack and Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, eds., *Art, Nation and Gender* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003).

⁴⁶ The complexity of this relationship is discussed in relation to different parts of the British Empire in Ian Christopher Fletcher, Lara E. Nym Mayhall, and Phillippa Devine, eds, *Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race* (London: Routledge, 2000); See also Ruth Roach Pierson, ‘Nations: Gendered, Racialized, Crossed With Empire’, in Blom, Hagemann and Hall, *Gendered Nations*, 41–61 (47).

were used to oppose the female franchise, the understanding of separate spheres often defined women's role in the nation:

As mothers women have been charged with the responsibility of reproducing the race; as educators they were responsible for shaping responsible citizens; as sexual and moral beings women's virtue has been placed at the centre of the defence of the nation against 'degeneracy'; and as bearers of 'traditional' culture women have been given a central role in defining and maintaining national cultural identity. This association of women with the nation could be both empowering and constraining.⁴⁷

The designation of women as 'cultural guardians' was also recognised at an ethno-cultural and community level, and it is only by uncovering how individual women perceived and interpreted this role, that the balance of the contradictory forces of empowerment and constraint can be understood.⁴⁸

The concept of nation was often symbolised as 'home' or 'family', patriarchal and hierarchical, with male and female having different 'parental' roles.⁴⁹ In some situations women employed their recognised but limited status in the nation to try to extend their lives and opportunities. In appealing, for example, to their role as mother-educators there were grounds to argue for improved female education: 'A woman occupies a conspicuous position in the education of the people. She is the basic source of the people's education, thus, more significance should be given to the rise of women's education'.⁵⁰ However, while there could be agreement on the need to educate women, this was often seen as education for a domestic role. Thus, implicit in promotion of the nation as home was the gendered dichotomy of private-public spheres. In the Irish-Ireland movement of the 1890s, with its cultural nationalist focus, women saw an opportunity to expand their assigned domestic role, not by rejecting difference but by exploiting it. Mary E. L. Butler argued that 'respectable Irish women' could contribute significantly to building an independent Irish nation through activities

⁴⁷ Lynn Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman* (London: Pearson Education, 2002), 229.

⁴⁸ Discussed with regard to women being seen as 'guardians of a minority mother-tongue', in Pauline Burton, 'Women and Second-Language Use: An Introduction', in *Bilingual Women*, ed. by Pauline Burton, Ketaki Kushari Dyson, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), 1–29 (2–3).

⁴⁹ Discussed in Blom, Hagemann and Hall, *Gendered Nations*, 9. Also Karen Hagemann, 'A Valorous Volk Family', in Blom, Hagemann and Hall, *Gendered Nations*, 179–205 (193–194).

⁵⁰ Quoted in Irina Novikova, 'Constructing National Identity in Latvia', in Blom, Hagemann and Hall, *Gendered Nations*, 311–334 (326).

undertaken within the domestic sphere: ‘Their mission is to make the homes of Ireland Irish. If the homes are Irish the whole country will be Irish. The spark struck on the hearthstone will fire the stone of the nation’.⁵¹ Frank A. Biletz comments that Butler was rare in ‘making explicit the ramifications [that a more comprehensive conception of the nation] had for women’,⁵² and he suggests that:

More actively feminist women [...] continued to be concerned largely with political enfranchisement [...]. As a result, they tended to neglect the opportunities which cultural nationalism afforded women, particularly those who remained bound to the dominant ideology of separate spheres.⁵³

As Biletz discusses, many of the priorities of the Irish-Ireland ideology – the nurturing of the mother-tongue, the transmission of songs and tales, and the use of Irish-made products – related to the domestic environment. In addition, Irish women in their domestic role were being strongly promoted as the nation’s moral guardians: ‘If you aim at a civilisation of a high and noble character, you must begin at the hearth. If the hearth is not clean, the high places of state will be of like character’.⁵⁴ Timothy G. McMahon suggests that Mary Butler was presenting Irish women ‘with a picture of themselves that was both personally empowering and acceptable to the wider society’,⁵⁵ but it is difficult to ignore the limitations implicit in this view and, as Joanna Bourke argues, that ‘this affirmation of women’s domestic role came to restrict the possibility of their involvement in public life’.⁵⁶ Indeed, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, co-founder of the Irishwomen’s Franchise League in 1908, argued this point in stating that while women were prominent in the Gaelic League, the Irish industrial revival and Sinn Féin,

⁵¹ Mary E. L. Butler, ‘Irish Women and the Home Language’, *Gaelic League Pamphlets*, 6 [no date], 3.

⁵² Frank A. Biletz, ‘Women and Irish-Ireland: The Domestic Nationalism of Mary Butler’, *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, 6 (2002), 59–72 (72).

⁵³ Quoted in Biletz, ‘Women and Irish-Ireland’, 72.

⁵⁴ ‘At the Roots of Nationality’, *Irish Homestead*, 14 April 1906, 282; quoted in James MacPherson, ‘“Ireland begins in the home”: women, Irish national identity and the domestic sphere in the Irish Homestead, 1896–1912’, *Éire-Ireland*, 36 (2001), 131–152 (150).

⁵⁵ Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 101.

⁵⁶ Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890–1914* (Oxford, 1993), p. 268. Discussed in MacPherson, ‘“Ireland begins in the home”’; See also Maria Luddy, ‘Women and Politics in Nineteenth Century Ireland’, in *Women & Irish History*, ed. by Maryann Gialanella & Mary O’Dowd (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), 89–108 (101–102).

the nature of their work reinforced their domestic role.⁵⁷ Róna Nic Chongail, however, in her research on Agnes O' Farrelly, draws attention to the fact that 'the forward-looking Executive Committee of the Gaelic League' offered women a 'public, socially acceptable platform and encouraged their educational and literary pursuits'.⁵⁸ This again highlights the need to consider women's individual circumstances to understand their willingness to accept or reject a subordinate role defined by their gender. It was generally easier for women to participate more prominently in movements where the cultural was stressed more than the overtly political, and through this involvement to gain influence in other areas. As will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3, in particular, An Comunn Gàidhealach, a broadly similar organisation to the Gaelic League in Ireland, provided an important opening for women to participate in the public arena of the Gaelic movement in Scotland in support of the Gaelic cause.

The Gaelic Cause

The social situation in the Highlands and Islands in the nineteenth century has been summarised as 'economic boom and bust', with related waves of eviction, clearance, emigration and migration followed by 'a marked degree of social resurgence and reconstruction' in the later decades.⁵⁹ The land activism of the post-1870 period, particularly in its more actively political phase in the 1880s, was a significant factor in this 'recovery of confidence on the part of Gaelic-speaking Highlanders', contributing to 'the emergence of a more self-confident, self-conscious, and indeed more argumentative generation of Gaels, a generation familiar with formal institutions and their conventions, not only living in the Highlands, but in Lowland cities, in London, and overseas.'⁶⁰ A tangible marker of emerging cultural confidence was the success in 1882 of the campaign to establish a Celtic Chair at Edinburgh University, sending out a positive message on the importance of the Gaelic language and culture, and its place within the wider framework of Celtic scholarship.⁶¹ The expansion of Gaelic printing

⁵⁷ Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 71–72.

⁵⁸ Nic Chongail, 'Gaelic Ireland and the Female Dream', 65.

⁵⁹ *Caran an t-Saoghail: Anthology of 19th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, ed. by Donald E. Meek (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), xx–xxi.

⁶⁰ Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*', in *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008), 1–39 (15).

⁶¹ William Gillies, 'A Century of Gaelic Scholarship', in *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus a' Ghàidhlig*, ed. by William Gillies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 3–21.

and publishing further contributed to creating a sense of positive Gaelic identity, and the various Highland newspapers and Gaelic-focused periodicals encouraged writers, including some women, beyond the traditional literary ranks of clerics and male scholars. While the failure of the Education Act (Scotland) of 1872 to recognise Gaelic had a far-reaching and detrimental effect on Gaelic language and literacy, as will be discussed in chapter 3, it did provide a ‘cause’ that was seen by some as more cultural than political and therefore more attractive to those who either by class or conservatism were reluctant to align themselves with the crofters. The campaign for the teaching of Gaelic in Highland and Island schools was energetically pursued first by the Gaelic Society of Inverness and later by An Comunn Gàidhealach, and became an on-going focus for Gaelic activism that continues to the present day.

Although The Crofters’ Holdings (Scotland) Act passed by Parliament in 1886 did not satisfy the needs and demands of many of those who had agitated and protested throughout the previous decade, it represented a victory of sorts, and underlined the fact that change could be achieved through organised protest and political representation, and it also highlighted the power of the vote.⁶² By 1890, although agrarian protests would continue, the political temperature had dropped somewhat,⁶³ allowing the motivational energy and cultural confidence that had built up through the land agitation to be channelled towards language and cultural revival. In addition to the indicators of a more positive attitude to Gaelic and Gaelic culture from within the Gaelic-speaking community, there were also important outside influences that were revising the status and image of Gaelic in a broader Celtic context.⁶⁴ Linguistic studies in Europe, especially in Germany, continued to develop scholarship regarding the common roots and development of the Celtic languages, and scholarly interest also extended to Celtic archaeology, literature and lore.⁶⁵ The ‘Celtic’ designation, however, was used indiscriminately in this period, as it still frequently is, and took on vague meanings and shadings beyond concrete linguistic and cultural associations.⁶⁶ The misuse of the term

⁶² For this last point see Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 71.

⁶³ See James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2nd edn., 2000), 244–245.

⁶⁴ See William Gillies, ‘Alexander Carmichael and the Folklore of the MacMhuirich Poets’, in Stiùbhart, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 96–114, (112).

⁶⁵ Donald E. Meek, ‘Alexander Carmichael and “Celtic Christianity”’, in Stiùbhart, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 82–95 (85).

⁶⁶ For this discussion see Michael Newton, *Warriors of the Word: The World of the Scottish Highlanders* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009), 46–50.

was recognised at the time, particularly when the term ‘Celtic’ was used in place of ‘Gaelic’. The Gaelic activist, Malcolm MacFarlane, spoke on the subject in 1903 in his typical forthright style:

The term “Celtic,” [...] is very much misused in referring to matters which are purely Gaelic. The term “Celtic”, it is unnecessary, I hope, to tell you, embraces in its scope those branches of the Aryan language which are spoken in Brittany, Wales, Ireland, Man, and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and the peoples who speak them. In writing or speaking of these languages or peoples as one group distinct from other similar groups, or in referring to facts common to this one group, we are justified in using the word “Celtic”. But when it is something pertaining to only one of the elements of the main group we have in view, we are not justified in using the term. [...] That the Gaelic people of Scotland so much favour the name “Celtic” when “Gaelic” is the proper word to use, is a sure sign that their self-respect is slipping from them. It is therefore time for those who are guilty of using the word “Celtic” when “Gaelic” should be used, to desist. Personally I am sick of it.⁶⁷

The Europe-wide interest and enthusiasm that had been ignited by the publication of James MacPherson’s *Ossian* in the 1760s, epic poems claiming to be the work of an ancient Gaelic bard, had encouraged a romantic view of the Gaelic world, and the grandeur of the Highland landscape in particular. This romanticism was then amplified through the novels of Walter Scott, and by his creation of a colourful ‘Highland’ spectacle in Edinburgh for the visit of King George IV in 1822. Queen Victoria’s enthusiasm for the Highlands was well known – her ‘romantic little kingdom’ as she called it⁶⁸ – and the royal approval also extended to Gaelic, a fact that was seen by a many Gaelic-speakers as an important endorsement of the language at a time when there were plenty who would not have shared this perspective.

The romantic characterisation of ‘the Celt’ promoted in the essays of Ernest Renan (1823–1892)⁶⁹ and Matthew Arnold (1822–1888)⁷⁰ was also a significant

⁶⁷ Malcolm MacFarlane, ‘The Gaelic Language and the People who speak it: A Paper read before the Glasgow High School Ceilidh’, *OT*, 21 March 1903.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 42.

⁶⁹ Ernest Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races, and other Essays* (London & Felling on Tyne: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1896).

⁷⁰ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1867). See Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 2000), 40–50; George Watson, ‘Aspects of Celticism’ in *Ireland and Scotland: Culture and Society, 1700–2000*, ed. by

influence on outside perspectives towards the Gaelic-speaking world. In these discourses, the Celtic people, more specifically the Irish, were associated with what were regarded as ‘feminine’ traits – emotional, sensitive, impractical – in fact the same characteristics that were highlighted to deny women the vote. This was of course to make a political point and served to place the Irish, but also by association the Welsh, Breton, and Gaelic-speaking people, in a racially inferior position. In this hierarchy of cultures the ‘centre’ was associated with order, rationalism, and progress whereas the peripheries were identified with disorder, emotion and closeness to nature. As Silke Stroh suggests, this opposition can be given a positive or negative slant: ‘‘irrationality’ can be presented as ‘stupidity’ or as ‘creative spontaneity’’.⁷¹ In other words, the Celtic people were constructed as ‘exotic, but subtly inferior’.⁷² In addition to these various sources of romantic rhetoric, many European national revivals in the second half of the nineteenth century were identifying peasant or folk cultures as preserving the ‘essence’ of the nation and in this light the western seaboard of Ireland and Gaelic Scotland were of particular interest. From a number of perspectives, therefore, the Gàidhealtachd, and the western islands in particular, were idealised as remote and marginal but also as untouched by progress and thus the antithesis of the modern world, and the Gaelic-speaking inhabitants were described in similar discourse.⁷³

The essentialist qualities of romantic primitivism that Arnold and Renan had emphasised, underpinned the complex ideology of the artistic and literary movement that became known as the Celtic Revival, although in other respects the movement was more specifically focused, looking to ‘revive’ the artistic essence of Celtic ornament, taking inspiration from sources such as the Book of Kells or the intricate surface decoration on medieval west Highland stone crosses, as well as ideas and imagery from Celtic myths and legends. In Scotland, the Celtic Revival was embraced by the literary circle of Patrick Geddes, William Sharp and John Duncan

Liam McIlvanney & Ray Ryan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 129–143; Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, 67–70.

⁷¹ Silke Stroh, *Uneasy Subjects, Postcolonialism and Scottish Gaelic Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 154.

⁷² See Marjorie Howes, *Yeats’s Nations, Gender, Class, and Irishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 16–25.

⁷³ See Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). A number of these ideas are also discussed with particular reference to Scotland in Hayden Lorimer, ‘Your Wee Bit Hill and Glen’: The Cultural Politics of the Scottish Highlands, c. 1918–1945’, Unpublished PhD thesis, Loughborough University, 1997.

in Edinburgh, and had a strong following in the artistic communities of the Scottish Arts and Crafts Movement, as well as the important *fin de siècle* art movement that emerged from the Glasgow School of Art, referred to as the Glasgow Style.⁷⁴ An important indigenous example was the decorative applied art of Euphemia (1862–1941) and Alexander (1856–1941) Ritchie, who developed ‘Iona Celtic Art’ on the island of Iona, often incorporating Gaelic text into their designs.⁷⁵ The Celtic Revival intersected and interacted with the Gaelic movement in different ways, an example being the Geddes/Sharp/Duncan network in Edinburgh,⁷⁶ as will be discussed in chapter 4. While there was much that was positive about this interaction, the negative dimension came with the excessively romantic rhetoric that was a feature of the movement’s literary output in particular, and which became identified as a distinctive strand under the ‘Celtic Twilight’ label.⁷⁷ This view emphasised the ‘spiritual’ element of the Celtic world, and in a Scottish Gaelic context served to rarify and exoticise the Gaelic-speaking people and their culture, idealising the way of life in the Hebridean islands at a time when many islanders were experiencing severe economic hardship. The influence and pervasiveness of this discourse and the tensions that it created is a theme that threads through a number of the chapters in this study.

The Gaelic Movement

The various areas of cultural activity that developed in support of the Gaelic language and culture in the last decade of the nineteenth century were loosely referred to as the ‘Gaelic movement’, or ‘cùis na Gàidhlig’, a term that was also used in its English translation: ‘the Gaelic cause’. As already discussed, establishing the Chair of Celtic at Edinburgh University, the on-going efforts of the Gaelic Society of Inverness to promote the needs of Gaelic education, and not least the cultural confidence engendered

⁷⁴ See Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 38–47; Jude Burkhauser, ‘The Glasgow Style’, in *‘Glasgow Girls’: Women in Art and Design 1880–1920*, ed. by Jude Burkhauser (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1900), 96–97.

⁷⁵ See E. Màiri MacArthur, *Iona Celtic Art: The Work of Alexander and Euphemia Ritchie* (Isle of Iona: The New Iona Press, 2003); E. and A. Ritchie, ‘The Teaching of Celtic Art’, *DG*, 2 (1906–07), 122–123.

⁷⁶ Murdo Macdonald, ‘*Anima Celtica*: Embodying the Soul of the Nation in 1890s Edinburgh’, in Cusack and Bhreathnach-Lynch, *Art, Nation and Gender*, 29–37; Murdo Macdonald, ‘The Visual Dimension of *Carmina Gadelica*’, in Stiùbhart, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 135–145.

⁷⁷ The name came from the title of a book by the Anglo-Irish poet, W. B. Yeats, published in 1893. See Donald E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity*, 53–54; Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, 71–72.

through the land agitation, provided the positive trajectory in which the concept of a Gaelic cultural movement developed.⁷⁸ The need for a more formal presence and forum resulted in the formation of An Comunn Gàidhealach in Oban in 1891, initially inspired by the annual Welsh National Eisteddfod (established in 1861). Following the Welsh example, the creation of a similar annual Gaelic festival became the main aim of the organisation in its early years.⁷⁹ An Comunn had, therefore, from the start a cultural focus underpinned by language loyalties, encapsulated in its motto: ‘Ar Cànan ’s Ar Ceòl’.⁸⁰ In the same way that much of the organisational and political support for the crofters came from the Lowland Gaelic communities, Glasgow and Edinburgh in particular, but also towns such as Perth, Paisley and Greenock, it was from these same communities (as well as the two Highland towns of Oban and Inverness) that much of the enthusiasm for the Gaelic movement in general and support for An Comunn in particular, also came. However, in contrast to the political and class divisions evident in the land agitation, An Comunn’s broad cultural focus, along with an espousal of a non-political ethos, and incorporating the Celtic ‘spirit of the age’, attracted and accommodated a diversity of ideologies and motivations in its membership. There were certainly tensions at the centre of the organisation, as will be discussed in more detail in a number of the chapters that follow. One of the most prominent and persistent critics was Ruairaidh Erskine of Marr,⁸¹ particularly in the first decade of the twentieth century, when the organisation had grown considerably and was recognised as the leading body of the Gaelic movement:

[An Comunn Gaidhealach] had small beginnings, like most Societies of its kind, and in course of time came to mildly prosper. [...] It was never a National Society, inasmuch as it always deliberately cut itself off from “Politics” – the one thing which could have made it National; for a nation without “Politics” is as inconceivable as an ocean without water.⁸²

⁷⁸ See Meek, *Caran an t-Saoghail*, xxiv–xxv.

⁷⁹ See ‘The Founders of An Comunn Gaidhealach’, *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 90–91; Frank Thompson, *History of An Comunn Gaidhealach: The First Hundred 1891–1991*, (Inverness: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1992), 11.

⁸⁰ ‘Our Language and Our Music’. An Comunn is discussed in chapter 2.

⁸¹ See chapter 2, 35–36.

⁸² ‘The Recent Crisis in the Gaelic Movement’, *GB*, 5 (1908), 233–250.

Erskine's political sympathies were unambiguous and he published his political views at length through letters to the press, and particularly in his own publication, *Guth na Bliadhna*:

We stand for Scotland and a Scottish State [...]. We aim at "Scotland a Nation" – whether within, or without, the limits of the Imperial fold concerns us not, so long as "Scotland a Nation" we obtain.⁸³

While Erskine had a small network of support within the Gaelic movement, including the Gaelic activist Malcolm MacFarlane, the members of this group were more circumspect in revealing their political opinions and it is difficult to establish to what extent they shared Erskine's political view. It is quite likely Macfarlane supported home rule, which took on a degree of respectability in 1886 when the Liberal leader, W. E. Gladstone, was converted to that particular political model.⁸⁴ However, within the Gaelic-speaking community in general there was little evidence of a nationalist agenda, once the political momentum of the Land Agitation had dissipated. While the charismatic personality of John Murdoch (1818–1903) had been able to gather support for ideas of national regeneration, imagining in the late 1870s that the Gaelic cause might become the catalyst that would 'fan the flame of nationality',⁸⁵ Ruairidh Erskine was not able to influence Gaelic political opinion in the same way, and indeed in the way he himself had been inspired by Murdoch:

This true descendent of the ancient Gaels preached a 'live' and manly doctrine. In one sense he was the Father of the modern Gaelic movement. [...] The battle cry of 'Alba! Alba!' [...] he raised to virile life once more. His was no diluted creed – watered down sentimental 'patriotism', guaranteed as fit for Comunn Gàidhealach tea-fights – but a strong and virile policy.⁸⁶

In the gendered language of this statement it is not difficult to sense that Erskine saw no place for women in this fight, although another champion of Scottish home rule and Gaelic, Professor John Stuart Blackie,⁸⁷ would possibly have taken a different

⁸³ R. Erskine, 'Former Gaelic Movements', *GB*, 6 (1909), 162–167 (166).

⁸⁴ See Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 74.

⁸⁵ Quoted in James Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection: The Highlands, Ireland and Nationalism', 1873–1922', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 54:2 (1975), 178–204 (184); See also James Hunter, *For the People's Cause: From the Writings of John Murdoch* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1986).

⁸⁶ Ruairidh Erskine, 'Former Gaelic Movements', *GB*, 6:2 (1909), 162–167, (165).

⁸⁷ See page 9, above.

perspective on the matter. Blackie was the first chairman of the Scottish Home Rule Association, formed in 1886, with which Ruairaidh Erskine was also involved. It should be noted, however, that there was not any great appetite for the nationalist cause in Scotland generally in this period – ‘the most comfortable of the three ‘Celtic’ nations in its relationship with the United Kingdom [in the late nineteenth century]’, as it has been described by one Scottish historian, and it was not until the inter-war period that a significant nationalist movement would become evident.⁸⁸

The Gaelic movement was neither a clearly defined initiative nor was it underpinned by a distinct ideology, and it embraced a range of educational, literary, musical and scholarly activities in support of the Gaelic language and culture. While An Comunn Gàidhealach formed the central arena for much of this participation, there were other groups and individuals involved within separate or intersecting contexts. As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, it was perhaps the diversity and broad scope of the Gaelic movement’s activity that attracted a number of individual women to recognise an opportunity to nurture their personal hopes and aspirations for the Gaelic cause.

Women and Gender

It is still almost standard practice for scholars researching the female experience across a spectrum of academic disciplines to begin by highlighting the invisibility of women in much of what has previously been written in their field. Angela V. John, for example, writing in the Introduction to a collection of essays on Welsh women’s history between 1830 and 1939, states: ‘The history of Welsh people has often been camouflaged in British history yet women have also been rendered inconspicuous within their own Welsh history’.⁸⁹ John is commenting here on an emphasis in Wales on ‘the land of our fathers’ that has often ignored the perspectives of women, and while a similar neglect could and has been suggested for research in Scotland,⁹⁰ one

⁸⁸ Cameron, *Impaled Upon a Thistle*, 66. See Hunter, ‘The Gaelic Connection’; Colin Kidd, ‘Race, Empire, and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood’, *The Historical Journal*, 46:4 (2003), 873–892.

⁸⁹ Angela V. John, ‘Introduction’, in *Our Mother’s Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History 1830–1939*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 1–16 (1).

⁹⁰ Discussed in Jane McDermid, *The Schooling of Working-Class Girls in Victorian Scotland* (London: Routledge, 2005), 14–16; Breitenbach and Gordon, *Out of Bounds*, 2; Lynn Abrams, ‘Gendering the Agenda’, in Abrams et al., *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, 1–16 (3). For a

could also add that what has been written about women has had a Lowland and an urban focus and has paid less attention to regional and cultural diversity. This is a bias that Lesley A. Orr MacDonald openly admits in her own valuable study on women and Presbyterianism, pointing out not just the absence of the Highland and Islands dimension, but also that of the rural North East, Northern Isles and the Borders.⁹¹ Women in Gaelic society make a very brief appearance in some general studies on Scottish women in the Victorian period, usually in connection with their resistance and activism during the land agitation. However, in his significant book on the land struggle in the Highlands, James Hunter scarcely mentions the participation of women, and Mary MacPherson is only referred to very briefly on two pages.⁹² More recently in connection with the extensive research being done by the Carmichael Watson Project,⁹³ much more information is emerging on many aspects of women's lives in the Gàidhealtachd and their engagement with Gaelic culture and community. In addition, this research has opened a window on Gaelic and Celtic Revival circles in Edinburgh of which the Carmichaels were a part, and not least has uncovered the significant input of Mary Frances and Ella Carmichael to Alexander Carmichael's work. Valuable work has also been done on women in Gaelic culture in connection with Gaelic song and poetry, particularly with respect to genres of song, individual poets, repertoire and oral transmission, recognising that songs were an effective and powerful way for a woman's voice to be heard in Gaelic society. The specific focus of this study, however, with its emphasis on women's involvement and contribution across a broad spectrum of activity in the Gaelic movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is an area that has received very little attention of any kind. Any reference to the public arena of the Gaelic movement at this time has tended to focus on the dominant male figures and the presence and participation of women has been largely overlooked. A number of

specific example see Jude Burkhauer, 'Restored to a Place of Honour', in *'Glasgow Girls', Women in Art and Design 1880–1920*, ed. by Jude Burkhauer (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1990), 19–26 (21).

⁹¹ Lesley A. Orr MacDonald, *A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland, 1830–1930* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2000), 22.

⁹² Hunter, 'The Gaelic Connection', 139 & 223.

⁹³ The Carmichael Watson Project, launched in 2005 in Edinburgh University Library, has been concerned with making the extensive and valuable collection of oral and material culture of the folklorist Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912) available to the wider public through the cataloguing, indexing, transcribing, translating and digitalisation of his collection. As part of this work extensive research has been undertaken to uncover and contextualise the life and work of this key figure in *fin de siècle* Gaelic and Celtic culture. See 'The Carmichael Watson Project', <<http://www.carmichaelwatson.lib.ed.ac.uk/cwatson/>>.

women who were prominent and significant participants in the Gaelic movement have slipped into the shadows or disappeared completely. This study, therefore, aims to reconfigure this view to foreground the contribution of women and to reclaim their place in the historical record of the Gaelic movement.

Using the generic term ‘women’, as this study does, is not to suggest a collective community or an undifferentiated homogeneity, but recognises that as women they were subject to similar societal assumptions and control on account of their gender, although the consequences will differ for individual women according to personal circumstances including class and cultural background. Gender is therefore an important factor, interacting with class and race, in understanding how women are restrained or empowered, and is particularly relevant in a period when definitions of femininity and women’s place in public life were a prominent and significant debate. Gender is understood as the way in which societies construct and maintain social relationships between the sexes, recognising that constructs of masculinity and femininity are subject to historical time and place, continually being contested or reaffirmed.⁹⁴ Thus gender is used in this study as an analytical tool to examine the challenges and tensions that individual women negotiated in the various areas of their Gaelic involvement, and at a moment in time when essentialist ideas of femininity and masculinity were being challenged, while recognising that there were also other important factors that shaped and influenced their lives and ideas.

Scope, Structure and Sources

Each of the following six chapters introduces and discusses women’s active participation in a particular area of Gaelic cultural activity where there is a public dimension. The chapters fall into two groupings: Chapters 2–4 consider women’s involvement in formal groups or public bodies governed by rules and committee structures, while chapters 5–7 examine more informal and individual areas of participation but still with a public connection. Within the first grouping, chapter 2 focuses on the broad scope of activity that came under the Gaelic cultural remit of An Comunn Gàidhealach and introduces a number of women who will emerge as prominent figures across the study as a whole. Chapter 3 investigates the

⁹⁴ See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [rev. edn.]), 29; Mary Cullen, ‘Foreword’, in *Gender Perspectives in 19th Century Ireland*, ed. by Margaret Kelleher & James H. Murphy (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997), 5–8.

involvement of women in promoting Gaelic in a number of different educational contexts, including their involvement in An Comunn's education campaigns, and as school board women and teachers, while chapter 4 considers the wider domain of Gaelic cultural groups and societies and focuses in particular on groups that had a scholarly or a pan-Celtic agenda. In the second grouping, chapter 5 explores individual women and their Gaelic literary endeavours across a spectrum of literary activity and genres. Chapter 6 is concerned with women who were collecting Gaelic song and lore and assesses their individual collecting perspectives and approaches, and the dynamics of their relationship with the oral tradition in specific communities. Chapter 7 explores the different ways some women adopted to support the Gaelic cause from a public platform in a performance context. Finally, chapter 8 draws together the individual chapter conclusions and the themes that have provided discussion threads across all the chapters.

Through an interpretive strategy the subject of this study has been approached from a variety of perspectives, drawing on ideas from gender, cultural and social history, and literary studies. The research approach has been to identify and critically assess a wide range of primary and secondary sources, a number of which are little-known or under-examined. Primary sources have included archival papers and letters; minutes of various groups; newspapers, particularly the Highland press; and a broad spectrum of Gaelic and Highland periodicals of the period. Retrieving the record of women in the past involves a great deal of searching and sifting, and the piecing together of scattered references. The most important source of information has been the extensive archived papers of Malcolm MacFarlane (1853–1931) in the National Library of Scotland.⁹⁵ MacFarlane was a central figure in the Gaelic movement, his correspondents were many, and included a number of women. These personal letters have been invaluable in accessing private opinions and ideas, providing an important counterpoint to the public press reports, and indeed bringing the voices of individual women alive. In addition, MacFarlane also corresponded with many of the prominent male Gaelic activists and their letters throw light on individual tensions and the different loyalties that underpinned these relationships. The letters of Ella Carmichael and Alexander Carmichael to Father

⁹⁵ NLS Acc. 9736.

Allan McDonald have been another rich source of information,⁹⁶ particularly when examined in the context of other primary sources. Documenting, contextualising and assessing this range of diverse source material in both Gaelic and English has formed the research base for all the chapters that follow.

Throughout the study, quotations from private letters and press reports are given verbatim, with no attempt to modernise or standardise spelling or grammar. In the Gaelic quotations in particular this means that the use of accents varies considerably and in many examples accents are absent all together. Where short Gaelic phrases are quoted, these are translated in the footnotes; for all other Gaelic textual material, English translations are provided in Appendix I, and all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

As will be discussed, a number of the women in the Gaelic movement found influence and inspiration in the activism of their female counterparts in the Irish revival movement. In writing this thesis I have been similarly inspired by the work of scholars who have published studies on individual women and groups of women who were active in the Irish Cultural Revival that was contemporaneous with the Gaelic movement in the period of this study. These books⁹⁷ have opened new vistas on that particular cultural and political landscape providing an integrated picture of the personalities involved, male and female, and offering a refreshingly different interpretation of familiar terrain from a female perspective. It is an aim of this study on the participation of women in the Gaelic movement in the three decades before the Great War to provide a first step in a similar direction. The women who are the subject of this study were not a homogeneous group; they were women of diverse social, cultural and educational background, and with different Gaelic affinities. In their involvement and participation across a spectrum of Gaelic cultural activities they were interacting with other women and men in a range of formal and informal situations and networks. An understanding of the dynamics of these groupings, the

⁹⁶ Typescript copies of letters from Alexander and Ella Carmichael to Father Allan McDonald, Canna House [originals no longer extant]. This reference will be abbreviated in future footnotes as Canna House Letters. I am very grateful to Dr Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart for alerting me to the copies of the letters and making them available to me.

⁹⁷ In particular: Róna Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh agus an Fhís Útóipeach Ghaelach* (Dublin: Arlen House, 2010); Catherine Morris, *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013); Karen Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics During the Irish Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007); and Diarmaid Ó Doibhlín, 'Womenfolk of the Glens of Antrim and the Irish Language', in *Feis na nGleann: A Century of Gaelic Culture in the Antrim Glens* (Belfast: Stair Uladh, 2005), 15–29.

views expressed and debated, and the perspectives, loyalties and values that linked individual women and men across the broad scope of the Gaelic movement will emerge in the chapters that follow.

This study will show that a number of women were actively involved with the Gaelic movement in the period between the passing of The Crofting Act and the start of the Great War; that they were innovative, ambitious and wide-ranging in their participation; and that through their Gaelic cultural activism they were able to progress both their individual aspirations as women as well as their support for the Gaelic language and culture.

2

‘Suas leis a’ Ghàidhlig’: Women in An Comunn Gàidhealach

One of the great hopes of our Gaelic movement is the active part taken by ladies. With their inspiring and stimulating help, the Comunn will go on conquering and to conquer. Miss Elspeth Campbell’s gracious and winning presence won golden opinions from all. As for Mrs Burnley Campbell, she is our banner bearer. Defeat? Never mention the word while such ladies have gathered to the rally.¹

For goodness sake don’t admit any women! They are apt to spoil the show. The C[omunn] G[aidhealach] declension dates from female management, & they are best kept outside.²

Those attending the first Mòd of An Comunn Gàidhealach, held in Oban in 1892, were unlikely to have recognised a significant Gaelic cultural moment as it might now be considered, but there was plenty to suggest that it was a confident first step towards establishing an annual Gaelic festival. Although women were yet to be involved in an official capacity in the organisation, it was women who provided the dramatic highlights at this first Mòd. The Gaelic poet and well-known ‘voice of the people’, Mary MacPherson, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran (c1821–1898), confidently led off the singing competition for female voices, taking the opportunity to eulogise Lord Archibald Campbell (1846–1913), the first president of An Comunn Gàidhealach, who at the end of her performance ‘conducted the Skye poetess off the platform in the most chivalrous and thoughtful fashion, amid loud applause’.³ At the Gaelic Concert in the evening the royal presence of the Princess Louise, wife of the Marquis of Lorne, caused considerable excitement, only eclipsed by the ‘magnificent’ singing

¹ ‘Impressions of my first Mod’ by a Special Correspondent, *OWN*, 7 Nov 1906.

² Ruairidh Erskine of Marr to Malcolm MacFarlane, 13 Dec 1911. NLS Acc. 9736/17.

³ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach: First Mòd at Oban’, *Oban Express*, 14 Sept 1892.

of Miss Jessie N. MacLachlan (1866–1916).⁴ This young woman, who was following a career as a professional singer, was originally from Oban and the local connection prompted the uninhibited pride evident in her reception:

Nothing in Gaelic vocal music has ever been heard in Oban or elsewhere to equal the magnificent range of Miss MacLachlan's voice. [...] In all her Gaelic songs Miss MacLachlan was in rare voice [...] her entrance to the platform hushed to silence the buzz of conversation, and even calmed the troubled spirits in the very uncomfortably packed parts of the hall.⁵

Although An Comunn was open to women from its formation in 1891, it was only at the start of the twentieth century that women began to appear on its committees and actively contributing across the scope of its activities in support of the Gaelic language and culture. This female influence gradually increased throughout the first decade of the new century. Attitudes were changing with regard to women's participation in areas of society previously closed to them and women themselves were challenging restrictions imposed on account of their gender. Nevertheless, there was still some opposition to the participation of women in mixed-gender organisations on equal terms with men. Societies where the focus of interest was literary or musical were, on the whole, more open to women's involvement, while scientific groups and prestigious 'learned' societies tended to be reluctant to give in to pressure to admit women.⁶ The Folklore Society (1878) and The Folk Song Society (1898) as well as the Irish (1904) and Welsh (1906) Folk Song Societies all had women as influential founder members and as office-bearers. The Gaelic League in Ireland, formed in 1893, was one of the first Irish organisations to admit men and women on equal terms,⁷ and a number of women became prominent activists.⁸

⁴ Jessie N. MacLachlan and Màiri Mhòr will be discussed in chapter 7.

⁵ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: First Mòd at Oban', *Oban Express*, 8 Sept 1892.

⁶ The Royal Geographical Society, for example, debated the issue of admitting women as Fellows for over twenty years, before the first women were elected in 1913. Even in the scholarly context, however, it was a variable picture; The Royal Scottish Geographical Society admitted women from its foundation in 1884. See Morag Bell and Cheryl McEwan, 'The Admission of Women Fellows to the Royal Geographical Society, the Controversy and the Outcome', *The Geographical Journal*, 3 (1996), 295–312. Closer to the subject of this study, the Edinburgh University Celtic Society also debated the admittance of women over a long period before finally capitulating after the Second World War. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

⁷ Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 41. See also Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 99.

As a result of the land agitation of the 1880s and the passing of The Crofters' Act in 1886, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a residue of energy and a degree of cultural confidence that was channelled into addressing the needs of the Gaelic language and culture, resulting in the formation of An Comunn Gàidhealach in 1891. Despite its weaknesses, The Crofters' Act considerably diffused the political heat of the land war and, although challenges to landowning authority continued, by the end of the decade there was a relative truce.⁹ This, along with the fact that An Comunn strove to nurture a politically neutral ethos, encouraged from the start a spectrum of class participation in the organisation, with Lord Archibald Campbell as the first President. While the comment of an enthusiastic attendee at the 1906 Mòd that 'Parsons and doctors, lawyers and teachers, landlords and crofters all met on a common platform'¹⁰ might be considered overly idealistic, there was a degree of truth in the statement. Nevertheless, the class tensions that became sharply focused during the land war remained, and thus the involvement of members of the Highland gentry in An Comunn was an uncomfortable fact for some Gaelic activists. In contrast, there were others who still retained a strong element of historical loyalty and respect for the clan chief, particularly where the latter was still resident in the Highlands and maintained an active interest and role in the local community. These seemingly oppositional channels of cultural and political allegiance in fact ran alongside each other and co-existed within the same cultural milieu. There were, however, other tensions and long-standing oppositions that regularly flared up amongst the various factions of An Comunn personnel, creating troubled waters that the women who entered the committee arena of the organisation in the early years of the twentieth century had to learn to negotiate with diplomacy.

The early years of An Comunn were focused on establishing The Mòd as an annual Gaelic festival, developing its size and scope year by year as more

⁸ Agnes O'Farrelly, Jennie Wyse Power, Jennie Flannigan (later the wife of Éamon de Valera), Mary E. L. Butler, Alice Milligan, and Norma Borthwick amongst others. See McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, 95–102; and Riona Nic Chongail, 'Gaelic Ireland and the Female Dream: Agnes O'Farrelly's Cultural Nationalism', in *Women, Social and Cultural Change in Twentieth Century Ireland: Dissenting Voices?*, ed. by Sarah O' Connor and Christopher C. Shepard (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 51–66 (65).

⁹ James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, John Donald, 2nd edn., 2000) 244–251.

¹⁰ 'Impressions of my first Mòd', *OWN*, 7 Nov 1906.

competitions were added and interest in the event grew.¹¹ By the turn of the century, An Comunn had extended its activity to embrace literary, artistic, educational and philanthropic initiatives, and this broad cultural platform, together with changing gender attitudes in society in general, encouraged more women to become actively involved in the organisation. This chapter will consider the range and detail of women's involvement and influence in An Comunn Gàidhealach. It will firstly discuss the advent of women in the organisation and the scope of their participation within the committee structure, highlighting a small circle of individual women who will be referred to throughout the chapter, and indeed some of whom will feature in a number of the chapters that follow. The presence of women in an active rather than a passive capacity and their encroachment on what had previously been all-male territory created different alliances and oppositions, and the chapter will explore the gender, class and cultural tensions underpinning these relationships.

The advent of women in An Comunn Gàidhealach

For the first decade of its existence, An Comunn Gàidhealach was all-male in leadership and authority; this was not surprising for the late Victorian period when, despite the growth and activism of the women's movement, the Victorian ideology of gendered spheres still influenced perceptions of appropriate male and female behaviour, and therefore women were not usually to be found in oratory or opinion-forming roles. On the occasion of the first Mòd in 1892, there was only one woman among all the gentlemen in the official platform party, namely Lady Elspeth Campbell (1873–1942), a young woman of nineteen at the time, who was accompanying her father, Lord Archibald Campbell. A decade later she was one of a number of women who were involved in An Comunn. From her presence as the daughter of the President in 1892, Lady Elspeth was herself Honorary President at the Mòd in 1906, and on that occasion she delivered an address from the platform.¹² In contrast to her position as a lone female in 1892, the platform in 1906 was well-peppered with female representation. Introduced as 'a lady of the House of Argyll', Lady Elspeth remarked in her speech on the fact that she had been present at the first Mòd with her father, thus identifying her family connection with the event from its

¹¹ Thompson, *History of An Comunn Gaidhealach*, 20.

¹² OWN, 3 Oct 1906.

inception and also perhaps a sense of her now fulfilling an implied expectation from that occasion. Lord Archibald was the second son of the 8th Duke of Argyll, and although, or perhaps because, he was not the heir to the Campbell title, and following a personal interest, he embraced the historical mantle of the clan chief as patron of the Gaelic arts.¹³ Whether he also wanted to attempt to ‘draw a line’ under the antagonistic relations that developed between his father and his crofting tenantry during the land war, and which was still on-going in Tiree into the 1900s,¹⁴ is open to speculation, but he was credited with having a genuine interest in Gaelic literature and Highland music, and as well as his literary endeavours,¹⁵ he made generous donations in different forms to An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Mòd.¹⁶ For Lord Archibald’s part, it would be natural for him to want this patronage to continue in his own family, and since his son was taking the educational path south of the border typical for a male of his class, it was his daughter Elspeth who was encouraged to follow her father’s example.¹⁷ Her involvement with An Comunn remained more in the style of an informed and supportive patron rather than an active participant although, as will be seen, there were other female members of the ‘lesser’ Argyllshire Campbell gentry who put their shoulder energetically to the An Comunn Gàidhealach wheel.

The first official input by women to An Comunn was as donors of prize-money for the various competitions at the Mòd. A list of donors was published each year from 1905, and previous to that the donors were credited in the Mòd Syllabus and often in press reports. In 1899, the name of Margaret Burnley Campbell of Ormidale appears for the first time, donating prize-money for the best Gaelic letter

¹³ In ‘The Gaelic Literature of Argyll’, (*Laverock*, 3 (1997), 14–19), Donald Meek refers to the ‘often overlooked’ importance of the historical role of the Campbells of Argyll as patrons of the Gaelic arts.

¹⁴ ‘Duke of Argyll and Tiree Cottars’, *OT*, 8 June 1901.

¹⁵ Lord Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll* (Edinburgh and London, 1885); and *Craignish Tales*, Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition 1, (London: David Nutt, 1889).

¹⁶ This role was recognised in the song ‘Fàilte Dhuit, Slàinte Dhuit’, composed in the style of a traditional eulogy for a clan chief by John MacFadyen in 1893 and dedicated: ‘To Lord Archibald Campbell, on his coming to preside at the second Mòd of the Comunn Gaidhealach’, (‘Our Musical Page’, *Celtic Monthly*, 2 (1893–94), 149.) Lord Archibald was the only one of his siblings who retained this strong cultural connection, although his sister Lady Victoria Campbell devoted her life to running philanthropic schemes to help the women and girls in various parts of the Duke’s estates, including Tiree, and she learned Gaelic as part of that mission.

¹⁷ Lady Elspeth Campbell also followed her father in his piping interest, and was one of the founders of the Piobaireachd Society. See Alastair Campbell, *A History of Clan Campbell: From the Restoration to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 275.

from pupils of an Argyllshire school where Gaelic was taught,¹⁸ a competition which she continued to sponsor. In 1902, Ella Carmichael offered prizes for two-part choral singing confined to Ladies' Choirs,¹⁹ and she also continued to donate prizes for two or three different categories at subsequent Mòds, including a £3 prize 'for the best Recitation of a Gaelic Sgeulachd without written or other aids to the memory',²⁰ reflecting her interest in the oral story-collecting work undertaken by her father, the collector and antiquarian Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912). Among the women who gave prizes in this period were the wives of influential men in Gaelic circles, although they themselves were not, nor did they become, more actively involved: Mrs Fraser-Mackintosh,²¹ Mrs Stuart Ruaraidh Erskine²² and Mrs J. M. Campbell, Oban.²³ When the first official list of 'Subscribers to the Prize Fund' was published in 1905,²⁴ there were nine women listed out of a total of sixty-eight individuals and groups. The variation from year to year in the list of subscribers often reflected the geographical location of the Mòd. For example, the names on the 1905 list, when the Mòd was held in Dingwall, included the Countess of Cromartie, the Duchess of Sutherland, Dingwall Town Council, and 'And. Carnegie, Esq, of Skibo', the contribution from the latter gentleman being the largest on the list. There was, however, a regular 'core' who donated regardless of the provenance of the Mòd, which suggests a level of commitment beyond local interest, and Margaret Burnley Campbell and Ella Carmichael were both in that category.

At the 1903 Mòd, held in Inverness, the delegate from the Welsh Eisteddfod, Gwyneth Vaughan (1852–1910), spoke from the platform, possibly the first time a woman had given a public address at the Mòd. She advised her audience: '[I]f they wanted to keep their language they would have to be in earnest. There must be no smattering or flirting with the English tongue or with any other tongue. [...] No nation could give out its best that had no language of its own'.²⁵ She also

¹⁸ 'Gaelic Mòd in Edinburgh', *OT*, 17 Oct 1899.

¹⁹ See chapter 4, 130.

²⁰ Mòd Prize List 1902 in NLS Acc. 9736/77

²¹ Eveline May Holland, wife of Charles Fraser-Mackintosh (1828–1901), the Liberal and Crofter MP.

²² Maria de Guadalupe Heaven, wife of Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr. See 'The Hon. R. Erskine of Marr', *Celtic Annual* (1918–1919), 5–7.

²³ Wife of Sheriff John Macmaster Campbell, one of the original founders of An Comunn Gàidhealach.

²⁴ 'Subscribers to the Prize Fund', (1905) in NLS Acc. 9736/41.

²⁵ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: The Mòd at Inverness', *OT*, 3 Oct 1903.

commended the Pan-Celtic Congress to be held in Caernarfon the following year. At the same Mòd, the Annual General Meeting saw three women named as Honorary Vice-Presidents – the Countess of Cromartie, Louisa Farquharson of Invercauld, and the Welsh Delegate, Gwyneth Vaughan.²⁶ More importantly, however, Ella Carmichael was elected onto the Executive Council, the first woman to join the central working committee of the organisation.²⁷ She was joined in 1904 by Margaret Burnley Campbell of Ormidale, and both women continued to be involved with An Comunn and the wider Gaelic movement for the rest of their lives.

The advent of women in An Comunn Gàidhealach was consolidated at the Dingwall Mòd in 1905, when the Countess of Cromartie was Honorary President,²⁸ the first time a woman was given this position. The other source of female impetus at the 1905 Mòd was the delegate representing the Gaelic League of Ireland, Agnes O'Farrelly (1874–1951),²⁹ who began her spirited oration in Irish before switching to English, promoting the Gaelic cause as a common cause: 'And never was there a greater cause, a nobler ideal to fight for, than the uplifting of a people through their language, and the traditions of the past enshrined in that language'.³⁰ Agnes O'Farrelly, a Celtic graduate and university teacher, was well acquainted with the public platform through her experience as a member of the Executive of the Gaelic League and as an active committee member of The Irish Women Graduates Association.³¹ More significantly, however, she was a passionate Irish activist inspired by the vision of a Gaelic Ireland and in her address she extended this to embrace a Gaelic Scotland:

The language must be the central unit round which the ideals of the nation will cling; [...] It must spread from the Highlands to the Lowlands; and, if you are ever to be identified as a distinct people, the different races of which Scotland is composed must accept the national language as the bond of their union.³²

²⁶ 'Annual General Meeting', *OT*, 3 Oct 1903.

²⁷ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: Executive Meeting', *OT*, 7 Nov 1903.

²⁸ Sibell Lilian MacKenzie, Countess of Cromartie (1878–1962). See chapter 4, 113 & chapter 5, 169.

²⁹ Agnes O'Farrelly has recently been the subject of an in-depth biography by Ríona Nic Congail, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh agus an Fhís Útóipeach Ghaelach* (Dublin: Arlen House, 2010). Agnes O'Farrelly had attended the 1904 Mòd at Greenock as a delegate but on that occasion it was Mr J. J. Doyle from Londonderry who gave the platform address. (*OT*, 24 Sept 1904)

³⁰ 'The Dingwall Mod', *DG*, 1 (1905–1906), 8–10 (9).

³¹ Nic Chongail, 'Gaelic Ireland and the Female Dream', 51–66.

³² 'The Dingwall Mod', *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 8–10 (24).

Reflecting her equally passionate belief in women's rights, she emphasised a role for women in the Gaelic language revival: 'You have to fight here against an indifference and apathy which is worse than hostility; and in this fight you will never win until you gain the women on your side'.³³ She remarked on the fact that women seemed less proactive in the Gaelic cause in Scotland than was the case in Ireland, although acknowledging there were exceptions, stating: 'one of them is well-known and loved by us in Ireland'.³⁴ This comment most probably referred to Ella Carmichael, who attended the Celtic Congress in Dublin in 1901, visiting the city again in 1902, and she attended the national Oireachtas of the Gaelic League³⁵ on a number of occasions. As women of similar age,³⁶ with similar academic and cultural interests and a feminist outlook, the two would have found much in common.³⁷ Agnes O'Farrelly also expressed pleasure that An Comunn had a woman – the Countess of Cromartie – as Honorary President that year and went on to state the case for women being crucial to the Gaelic cause: 'The women of Gaelic Scotland must decide for you whether or not Gaelic will be the home language, or whether its sounds will be heard in the Highlands or in the Isles a hundred years hence'.³⁸

Both Agnes O'Farrelly and Gwyneth Vaughan³⁹ were skilled platform speakers, and were women who were accustomed to challenging gender restrictions. Their strong, passionate platform performances at the Mòd in 1903 and 1905 must surely have encouraged and inspired other women present, such as Ella Carmichael. However, it was perhaps more important that the male hierarchy in An Comunn at this time saw and heard women who were clearly comfortable on a public platform and capable of incisive and effective oral delivery, and who were officially representing similar organisations.

³³ 'The Dingwall Mod', 24.

³⁴ 'The Dingwall Mod', 23.

³⁵ The annual Irish language festival, similar to The Mòd, and first held in 1897.

³⁶ Agnes O'Farrelly was four years older, born in 1874.

³⁷ Alexander Carmichael, Edinburgh, to Father Allan McDonald, 5 May 1902. Canna House Letters.

³⁸ 'The Dingwall Mod', *DG*, 1 (1905–1906), 8–10 (23).

³⁹ Gwyneth Vaughan was secretary of the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations and began addressing Liberal meetings in 1891, described as 'an orator [who] can hold thousands spellbound'. She was also prominent in the Temperance movement and campaigned for women's suffrage. See 'The Women of Wales', *Young Wales*, 7 (1901), 188; quoted in Kirsti Bohata, "'For Wales, see England?'" Suffrage and the New Woman in Wales', *Women's History Review*, 11 (2002), 643–656. See also Kay Cook and Neil Evans, "'The Petty Antics of the Bell-Ringing Boisterous Band?'" The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1890–1918', in *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830–1939*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 159–188 (163).

Women on An Comunn Gàidhealach Committees

As the work and influence of An Comunn expanded, the official governance of the organisation became more structured. In 1903, in addition to the Executive Council chaired by the president, three standing committees were formed, namely the Education,⁴⁰ Publication, and Finance and Propaganda committees, each with seven or eight members. Two further standing committees – the Mòd and Musical Committee, and the Highland Industries Committee with Celtic Art – were added in 1906, and Finance and Propaganda became two separate committees in 1908. From 1907 onwards there were regularly one or two women on most but not all of these committees. The Arts and Industries Committee, as it became known, did not include any women until 1908–09, when it then had a majority of women, the only committee to have more women than men. This aspect of An Comunn's remit was slow to develop, and only began to make practical progress at the time of the Féill in 1907. The Finance and the Publications Committees were the least likely to have women members; the first is not surprising at a time when it was still assumed that women did not require to have knowledge of business and money matters, although many women were in fact experienced in accounting and balancing budgets. The Publications Committee might perhaps have been seen as more accessible to female participation; however, the main thrust of An Comunn's publishing efforts was focused on producing graded Gaelic reading material and grammar books for schools, work that was overwhelmingly seen as the territory of established Gaelic scholars.

The composition of the Executive Council included elected members, representatives from local branches of An Comunn as well as from affiliated Societies, and its membership therefore fluctuated considerably both in personnel and attendance levels. In general, the number of women present at meetings of the Executive Council was not any more than three or four. At a meeting in June 1908, for example, there were three women out of a total of thirty members present, and this included Margaret Burnley Campbell, who was president at the time.⁴¹ This level of female participation at an official level in An Comunn was generally similar

⁴⁰ Women's involvement with the work of the Education Committee of An Comunn will be discussed in chapter 3.

⁴¹ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: Executive Meeting', *OWN*, 20 June 1908. The women were Margaret Burnley Campbell, Miss MacGregor of MacGregor and Winifred M. Parker.

to the Gaelic League in Ireland, although women in the latter organisation accessed official roles sooner. In Timothy G. McMahon's assessment, in the period up to 1910, the proportion of women on the Coiste Gnótha, the national executive committee of the Gaelic League, was about sixteen per cent: 'From year to year the number of women serving on the executive varied, but the number never grew to more than seven members of the [national executive] committee'.⁴² McMahon also states that, despite their minority status on the executive of the Gaelic League, 'women were among the most prominent leaders of the [Irish] Gaelic movement'.⁴³

A closer examination of the women who were named on the various standing committees of An Comunn between 1906 and 1918⁴⁴ provides an indication of the degree of committed female participation at the centre of the organisation. Frequently the same women were on two or even three different committees and they continued to be involved from year to year. Therefore, it is not surprising that the total number of women represented on the standing committees was only around fifteen during this period. Of this number, there was a core group of ten who were active across the various areas of committee activity, and the names of some of these women will crop up throughout this study as a whole. This 'core' group comprised: Mrs Margaret Burnley Campbell of Ormidale (1857–1938); Miss Ysobel Campbell of Inverneill (1882–1968); Miss Louisa Farquharson of Invercauld (1868–1942); Miss Murray MacGregor of MacGregor (1829–1919); Miss Lettice Macnaghten (b. 1880); Lady Helen Stewart Murray (1867–1934); Miss Juliet MacDonald (1848–1942); Miss Winifred M. Parker (1879–1962); Miss Ella Carmichael (1870–1928); and Miss Kate Fraser (1860–1918). The first five in this list were members of the Highland landed gentry and Lady Helen Stewart Murray was of the Highland aristocracy, being the daughter of the Duke of Atholl. Winifred Parker was from a privileged upper middle-class family with Highland connections, and Juliet MacDonald was the daughter of an Army captain from Lochaber. This leaves Ella Carmichael and Kate Fraser, who as daughters of an excise man and a weaver respectively were, on paper at least, from a lower socio-economic background. They were, however, both from families who encouraged them to take full advantage of

⁴² McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, 95, and note 50, (253).

⁴³ McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, 99.

⁴⁴ Information on the appointments to the Standing Committees is taken from the reports in *DG*, 1906–1918.

the expanding higher-education opportunities for women at the time, and were self-confident, intelligent and capable women. In any case, these gradations of class do not appear to have had any particular significance amongst the women themselves.

With regard to ability to speak Gaelic, Ella Carmichael, Juliet MacDonald and Ysobel Campbell were native speakers; Lady Helen Stewart Murray and Kate Fraser could understand the language but were not confident speakers; Margaret Burnley Campbell, Winifred Parker and Lettice Macnaghten took serious steps to learn the language and were reasonably successful; and lastly, Louisa Farquharson of Invercauld and Miss Murray MacGregor of MacGregor could probably speak a few rehearsed words and phrases. Four of the women married during their time with An Comunn – Ella Carmichael in 1906, Ysobel Campbell and Winifred Parker in 1909, and Lady Helen Stewart Murray in 1916. Of these four, Winifred Parker was the only one to withdraw from her work with the organisation on her marriage, due to the fact that she would be living abroad with her husband, who was a captain in the Egyptian army.⁴⁵ Margaret Burnley Campbell was already married with three of a family, and the others were all single. All of the women had private means or the ability to support themselves, the latter exemplified by Kate Fraser, who had a successful teaching career and became head infant-mistress of Farraline Park School in Inverness.⁴⁶ The women were not necessarily a homogenous grouping; Miss MacGregor of MacGregor, for example, was of an older generation, and Lady Helen Stewart Murray, keeping within the conventional boundaries of her aristocratic background, was more reserved in her participation, although she was possibly also of a naturally quiet disposition. They were, however, all living at a time when women were increasingly striving to expand their participation and influence in the public domain in particular and in society in general, and in different ways and with varying degrees of activism they each embraced the challenges of their gender in their own lives.

Not everyone welcomed the advent of women in the official domain of An Comunn Gàidhealach. The opposition of John MacKay (1865–1909) and Ruairidh

⁴⁵ ‘Announcement of Miss Winifred M. Parker’s Marriage’, *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 165.

⁴⁶ Kate Fraser, a native of Glen Urquhart, grasped the educational opportunities open to her, first as a pupil-teacher and then progressing to Marischal College in Aberdeen. See ‘Our Portrait Gallery: Miss Kate Fraser, F.E.I.S., Inverness’, *DG*, 7 (1911–12), 24–25.

Erskine of Marr is evident in gendered remarks such as ‘petticoat clique’⁴⁷, ‘suffragette president’⁴⁸ and ‘petticoat bossing’⁴⁹ in letters to Malcolm MacFarlane, all of whom were in the same Gaelic network. MacKay, the editor of the *Celtic Monthly*, became involved in a fairly public row over an Editorial he wrote in June 1907 in which he criticised An Comunn which he regarded as having ‘fallen on evil times’, suggesting that the women involved were part of the problem.⁵⁰ In a long diatribe, mostly concerned with what he alleged was some form of preferential voting that allowed too many members of the Oban Branch onto the Executive, he commented in the passing that: ‘the advent of ladies of oratorical gifts into the executive has not proved an unmixed blessing, one or two undignified performances [...] being a subject of humorous comment among Highlanders generally, and a source of annoyance to members’.⁵¹ There were only two ‘ladies’ on the Executive at that time, and when the matter was discussed at an ‘Indignation Meeting’ of the Oban Branch, the president declared that the remark ‘was in very bad taste’, and with reference to ‘Mrs Burnley Campbell and Mrs Watson’,⁵² continued: ‘there were no other two ladies in the Highlands who had done so much for the Gaelic movement [...] and their presence on the Executive was a power in its self’, a comment which was applauded by the meeting.⁵³ The outcome of the matter was that at the next meeting of the Executive, John MacKay was forced to retract his remarks, a fact that was ‘leaked’ to the press, causing him to feel that he had been undermined and misrepresented, as he strongly reiterated in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane:

I may tell you that I am bitterly infuriated at the mean way in which use has been made of my regret re. the ladies’ feelings being impaired. I made no apology, recanted nothing – I only said that I was sorry what I wrote hurt their feelings. I carefully repeated that I held the view that ladies ought not to be there. If they will insist on taking part in public matters they must stand public criticism.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Ruairaidh Erskine of Marr, Banchory, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 2 Sept 1911. NLS Acc. 9736/17.

⁴⁸ John MacKay, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 1908. [no date]. NLS Acc. 9736/144.

⁴⁹ John MacKay, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 5 Dec 1908. NLS Acc. 9736/134.

⁵⁰ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach An Obain’, *OWN*, 13 March 1907.

⁵¹ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach An Obain’, *OWN*, 13 March 1907.

⁵² Referring to Ella Carmichael who married Mr William J. Watson in July, 1906.

⁵³ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach An Obain’, *OWN*, 13 March 1907.

⁵⁴ John MacKay, Glasgow to Malcolm MacFarlane, 27 June 1907. NLS Acc. 9736/13.

The two women in question made no comment on the remark suggesting that they possibly would have preferred to quietly ignore the matter, in the knowledge that the publicity given to the row had already reflected badly on John MacKay, at a time when this sort of verbal attack directed towards ladies would have been regarded as ‘un-gentlemanly’, the very reason that John MacKay was so upset that the issue had been made public.⁵⁵ In effect, the two women were caught in the cross-fire of a row related to on-going tensions between a group close to Malcolm MacFarlane and another faction around W. J. Watson, and including some members of the Oban branch,⁵⁶ during a fairly turbulent period in An Comunn’s leadership. However, the fact that this less than conciliatory atmosphere coincided with the ‘hands-on’ involvement of women in the organisation suggested to some that the two were connected and that it was the advent of women that had caused the discord. This was the view of Ruairaidh Erskine of Marr as expressed in the second quote at the head of this chapter, and indeed it reflected a wider unease in society that women neglecting their traditional role and ‘challenging established institutions and patterns of male-female relations’ were precipitating the social decline associated with modernity.⁵⁷

Malcolm MacFarlane, who could wield his pen viciously when riled, does not seem to have had any strong opposition towards women’s involvement in the Gaelic movement, although he clearly at times felt unsettled by the direct approach of the modern woman. There were quite a number of women among his regular correspondents, and those who were involved with An Comunn frequently tried to

⁵⁵ John MacKay was on an upward social trajectory, having worked his way from office-boy to a partner in a firm of flour merchants, and he would therefore have been conscious of any publicity that might reflect negatively on him in the eyes of his business associates. See his letters to Malcolm MacFarlane in August 1904 in NLS Acc.9736/133.

⁵⁶ Malcolm MacFarlane’s relationship with the Executive of An Comunn became strained, to say the least, from 1905, the year he took on the task of producing and editing a new ‘in-house’ magazine for the organisation. When the first edition was published in October 1905 under the title *An Deo-Ghréine*, a debate ensued in the letters pages of the *OT* regarding the grammatical rights and wrongs of the lenition of ‘gréine’ in the title. MacFarlane, who had resigned his editorship on health grounds after only a few editions, was furious at having been ‘rebuked before the Gaelic world’ and when in October 1907, the title was changed to *An Deo-Gréine*, he referred to it as showing ‘contempt for my Gaelic taste by taking out the letter from the word which the good old Colm Cille [Columba] and all the grand old Gaels of the past used’.

⁵⁷ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 151. See also Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), 154–156. A similar view is presented in a Gaelic poem opposing the enfranchisement of women: ‘Ach ’s léir do gach glic-fhear, mur tig iad fo chis, Gu’n cuir iad an rioghachd tur dheth a seòl’. (Alasdair Camshron, ‘Na Mnathan Guth-Thaghach’, *People’s Journal*, 2 Oct 1915).

suggest the benefits to the greater cause of Gaelic if he would adopt a less-confrontational approach. In one such exchange Kate Fraser wrote:

[R]eally Mr MacFarlane I don't know anything at all about the "flare up" you speak of, or anything whatever about the Comunn in the past but if its ways have been evil surely it can let the "Dead past bury its dead" and begin anew, if there's room & need for reform?⁵⁸

Margaret Burnley Campbell also tried to negotiate a period of calm, suggesting to MacFarlane that the Gaelic cause was more important than the individual:

[W]ould you for the sake of the objects which An Comunn is backing, [...] you who has already given so much of yourself, do this thing also – make this sacrifice – of letting bygones be bygones! [...] To try and make our next general Meeting pass in peace must surely at this important juncture be the highest aim of everyone who wishes well to the Gaelic cause.⁵⁹

In a similar vein, Winifred Parker wrote:

[I]f I may without interfering say so, it is a real regret to me that you do not feel able to cooperate with the Comunn in so noble a cause – which ought to be too great for schisms among its adherents – however much you may disapprove of individual members of it – and yet perhaps it is for the best that there should be different influences at work.⁶⁰

It is notable to find these women all taking a conciliatory tack, reflecting one thread of pro-suffrage argument that pointed to the need for a less confrontational, 'feminine' approach in the aggressive all-male arena of political activity.⁶¹ As the extracts above show, however, it was not the case that the women did not express their opinions or challenge what they did not agree with, but that they made their point in a way that avoided further antagonism, seeking to move forward from positions of stalemate.

Amongst this group of women, Ella Carmichael in particular was alert to any discrimination on account of gender. When An Comunn Gàidhealach decided to produce Gaelic membership cards, along with a certificate in Gaelic for those who

⁵⁸ Kate Fraser, Inverness, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 6 March 1907. NLS Acc. 9736/132.

⁵⁹ Margaret Burnley Campbell to Malcolm MacFarlane, 15 March 1907. NLS Acc. 9736/132.

⁶⁰ Winifred Parker, Liverpool to Malcolm MacFarlane, 8 July 1908. NLS Acc. 9736/135.

⁶¹ See Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 19–20.

took out Life-Membership, she brought it to the attention of Malcolm MacFarlane that the life-member certificate was, in its Gaelic form, only applicable to a male: ‘It will be rather awkward when a woman’s name is filled in & followed by ‘air a dhèanamh na bhall re beatha’.....Do you propose that the secretary stroke out the aspirations or what?’.⁶² From an incomplete letter-trail on the subject it is not clear how Malcolm MacFarlane reacted to her comment but as it seems that the certificates were already at the printers, he may have considered it too late to do anything. Ella Carmichael, however, took her concern to Archibald Menzies, the president, who in turn passed the issue back to MacFarlane:

Miss Carmichael has pointed out that the Life Membership Certificate is for a male. We can easily arrange without much difficulty or expense to change the original to make it suitable for a female, and have another plate engraved. Possibly you will give me the Gaelic suitable for a lady member at your early convenience.⁶³

Malcolm MacFarlane, for whom the modern woman was clearly an unknown concept, was frequently the recipient of Ella Carmichael’s firm but polite reproach. In 1905, when he took on the daunting task of producing a monthly magazine for An Comunn Gàidhealach, he planned to follow the trend of many periodicals and newspapers of the time that had a section designated specifically for female readers dealing with cookery, current fashions and household advice, appropriate, as was thought, for feminine minds. In approaching Ella Carmichael to edit such a column he was given a clear indication of her view on the matter:

I will be glad to try to do anything you give me to do for the magazine. What sort of things do you want in the women’s corner? Fashions? If so I’m off! If you want to tell them that the women & their own efforts can keep Gaelic alive and honoured I could do that and shall if you can permit try to give you something on the subject.⁶⁴

She did in fact write an article entitled ‘Some Things Women Can Do’, taking a gendered perspective on the importance of women for the Gaelic language

⁶² E. C. Carmichael, Edinburgh, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 25 July 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/130. Gaelic syntax requires lenition or non-lenition in the phrase ‘has been made a life-member’ according to whether the person referred to is male or female.

⁶³ Arch. Menzies, Edinburgh to Malcolm MacFarlane, 1 Aug 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/130.

⁶⁴ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, 6 June 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/38.

movement,⁶⁵ and not surprisingly, ‘the women’s corner’ never materialised. Two aspects of this incident are notable; firstly it is an indication of the strength of Ella Carmichael’s feminist sentiments, particularly as many women at the time simply would not have recognised the gender assumptions involved,⁶⁶ and secondly that she used the issue to positively affirm the importance of women in the Gaelic cause and to the future of the language.

Women’s involvement in local branches

The setting up of provincial branches of An Comunn Gàidhealach was slow to develop in comparison with the Gaelic League. It was at the Annual General Meeting of 1899 that J. Macmaster Campbell,⁶⁷ suggested that a committee should be formed ‘to consider the formation of branches on the same principle as the Gaelic League in Ireland’, declaring that ‘the present membership of 70 might thereby easily be raised to 2000’.⁶⁸ The women involved with An Comunn were prominent in forming branches or ‘meuran’ in their home districts. Thus Mrs Burnley Campbell (Kilmodan), Miss Ysobel Campbell (Ardrishaig), Miss Farquharson of Invercauld (Newtonmore), Miss Kate Fraser (Inverness), Miss Lettice Macnaghten (Balquhidder), Miss Juliet MacDonald (Lochaber), and Lady Helen Stewart Murray (Atholl) were all influential in starting these local branches. In Kilmodan, Inverness, Balquhidder and Lochaber the associated women also initiated local children’s *Mòds* which became annual events, as well as organising Gaelic classes and programmes of lectures. Margaret Burnley Campbell founded her local branch, Comunn Gàidhealach Chillemhadaid, in 1905 and was innovative in planning its activities, including Gaelic drama, debates, Gaelic church services, and a reconstructed *luadh*, or waulking.⁶⁹ She became the most prominent and active woman within An Comunn throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century and remained involved all her life. The next section will take a closer look at her influence, input and ideas within the organisation, in particular her management of the grand fund-

⁶⁵ Ella Carmichael, ‘Some things women can do’, *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 8–10 (9).

⁶⁶ An example of this ubiquitous trend in a Gaelic context is found in the 1950s in *Gairm*, a publication that was innovative and modern in many aspects, and yet it included a section entitled ‘Gnothuich Bhoirionnach’, [Women’s Matters] introduced in the first issue with: ‘Chan eil leabhar sam bith coimhlionta an diugh gun fhacal àraidh do na boirionnaich!’. See *Gairm*, 1 (1952–53), 64.

⁶⁷ See note 23, (32).

⁶⁸ ‘Meeting of The Highland Association’, *OT*, 14 Oct 1899.

⁶⁹ These were regularly reported in Gaelic in *DG* and *OT*.

raising Féill of 1907, and ‘An Clachan’ at the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry in 1911.

Margaret Burnley Campbell

Unlike the Countess of Cromartie and Lady Elspeth Campbell, who had accepted figurehead roles as Honorary Presidents in 1905 and 1906, Margaret Burnley Campbell was not interested in the limited participation this designation implied. She made her view on the matter quite clear in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane in November 1906:

I forgot to thank you for this very kind matter you proposing me as [Honorary] President. As you know it is no want of interest or shrinking from work that led me to refuse. I loathe being a figurehead at any time.⁷⁰

The use of the word ‘loathe’ reveals the strength of Margaret Burnley Campbell’s feeling against being side-lined in an ‘honorary’ position, reflecting the fact that she was accustomed to being actively involved in whatever she undertook. As the only child, and heir, of William Morrison Hunter and Catherine Helen Campbell, Margaret Burnley Campbell inherited Ormidale, a small country estate in Glendaruel in south Argyll, from her mother. That matriarchal responsibility, underlined by her retaining the Campbell name from her female line, appears to have been a powerful force in her life. When she succeeded to the family estate in 1892, her husband, Major Hardin Burnley, also assumed the name Campbell.⁷¹ Her Campbell lineage went back to Archibald Campbell, second Earl of Argyll, who was killed at Flodden in 1513,⁷² and this being the case, she was connected directly to Cailean Mòr himself. A sense of this history and of deep ancestral roots in Argyll was a strong motivational ideal in her Gaelic activism. She was experienced in the practical running of her estate, and had also been a member of her local School Board since 1903, chairing it from 1905, one of a very small number of women across Scotland

⁷⁰ Margaret Burnley Campbell, Ormidale, Colintrave, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 3 Nov 1906. NLS Acc. 9736/40.

⁷¹ ‘The Late Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale’, *Dunoon Observer and Argyllshire Standard*, 19 March 1938.

⁷² ‘Funeral of Mrs Burnley Campbell’, *Scotsman*, 19 March 1938.

who were in that position,⁷³ and therefore it is quite clear that she was not someone who was content to be an onlooker.

In terms of her capabilities and drive it is not surprising that Margaret Burnley Campbell was made President of An Comunn Gàidhealach in 1907, but for a woman to be given that position in what might be described as a somewhat conservative body, was quite remarkable. There were, however, specific factors that were in her favour; in particular the fact that in 1906 she agreed to convene an ambitious fund-raising bazaar, or Féill as it was designated in its Gaelic dress, to be held in the autumn of 1907. Such was her energy and commitment in overseeing the detailed planning of this event that it was soon clear that it was on course to be a success and it was therefore deemed appropriate reward that she should be President, a position she retained for two years. Margaret Burnley Campbell's involvement across all areas of An Comunn's remit was immense and varied. She was constantly suggesting and implementing new ideas, many inspired by what she saw being done by the Gaelic League in Ireland as will be explored further chapter 3. One lasting example of this influence relating to An Comunn was her suggestion at an Executive meeting in April 1907 that 'Suas leis a' Ghàidhlig' be adopted as the rallying song of the organisation, and 'that all competing choirs be instructed to practise the same in view of its being sung at the grand concert in connection with the coming Mòd'.⁷⁴ Having attended the Irish Oireachtas in the autumn of 1906, it can be assumed that it was the experience of the singing of 'Go Mairidh ár nGaedhilg Slán', the 'rallying song' of the Gaelic League,⁷⁵ that prompted her to suggest a similar anthem for An Comunn Gàidhealach. Not only was the suggestion taken up, but to the present day 'Suas leis a' Ghàidhlig'⁷⁶ is sung at the closing concert of the Royal National Mòd. The strains of the winning choirs and everyone present singing 'Togaibh i, togaibh i, cànan ar dùthcha' still has an unexpected power although few today will know anything of the person who first recognised the positive impact of such a moment for cultural cohesion and pride.

⁷³ Jane McDermid, 'Blurring the Boundaries: school board women in Scotland, 1873–1919', *Women's History Review*, 19 (2010), 357–373 (361).

⁷⁴ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: Meetings of Executive', *OT*, 20 April 1907.

⁷⁵ McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, 158.

⁷⁶ The song was written by Duncan Reid, and Henry Whyte composed the rousing tune.

All the evidence suggests that Margaret Burnley Campbell was a natural orator on the public platform, characterised by ‘unpretentious eloquence and telling effect’ and ‘deep feeling, intense conviction and a ringing sincerity’.⁷⁷ She certainly showed no reluctance or fear towards public speaking; on the contrary she appears to have relished the role and spoke from the platform at numerous functions of An Comunn, visiting many local branches to offer encouragement, often during inclement weather in the winter months. She also addressed other Highland and Gaelic groups including the annual gathering of the Greenock Highland Society as early as 1905 in front of a crowd of well over a thousand,⁷⁸ and a gathering of Church of Scotland Highland ministers during the General Assembly of 1913. Her speeches, frequently reported in the press, were always propagandist but tailored in theme according to her audience. At Greenock, she praised the Highland Society for the fact that it was ‘[unlike] too many of its kind [existing] only for the purpose of organising pleasant evenings’. Refuting the view that the Gaelic revival was ‘the harmless fad of a few enthusiastic Gaels’, she described it as ‘part of a great European movement, a reaction against the system of excessive centralisation [...] which the smaller European nations seem to have realised was very much to their disadvantage and the possession of a national language meant a great deal more than had hitherto been imagined’. She went on to give examples, citing successful language revivals in Bohemia (the Czech national revival movement), Poland, Hungary and ‘brave little Finland’, while referring in passing to Norway, Greece, Belgium, Portugal, and ‘our brother Celts of Ireland and Wales’. Her suggestion for addressing the needs of Gaelic was ‘to [ignore] those who say it is too late [...] and [for] all those whose hearts are Highland [...] to lay aside private differences and social distinction, and form one great Gaelic confederation’.⁷⁹ At a concert in Fort William in January 1909 under the auspices of the Lochaber branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach,⁸⁰ Margaret Burnley Campbell’s platform address took account of the developing tourist industry in Lochaber. She suggested that Gaelic could enhance the visitor’s experience if the language was heard spoken on the streets and in the hotels,

⁷⁷ ‘The Late Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale’, *AG*, 33 (1937–1938), 103.

⁷⁸ ‘Greenock Highland Gathering: Mrs Burnley Campbell and the preservation of Gaelic’, *OT*, 16 Dec 1905.

⁷⁹ ‘Greenock Highland Gathering’, *OT*, 16 Dec 1905.

⁸⁰ ‘An Comunn Gàidhealach an Lochabar’, *OT*, 2 Jan 1909.

if ‘shop windows [were] filled with distinctively Celtic goods’, and if there was Gaelic signage, ideas that have only in much more recent times been given any credence:

Why are the names above the shop doors [...] not sometimes written in Gaelic? The names of the stations on the railway lines, and of the streets in the towns, would also be so much more interesting if written in both languages. It is nothing new I am suggesting for in Dublin nearly all the street names are printed up in both Gaelic and English.⁸¹

On another occasion, addressing a meeting to consider the setting up a branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach in Islay in February 1912,⁸² Margaret Burnley Campbell had four recommendations for her audience in support of Gaelic: to use Gaelic at home with their children; to see that Gaelic reading and writing were taught in their schools; to attend church services in Gaelic; and to support Highland Industries. When she spoke at the meeting of Highland Ministers in 1913, her plea was for Gaelic in Highland schools at primary and secondary level, coupled with the Church’s duty to ensure ‘the preaching of the gospel in Gaelic’, connecting the latter as a living link with ‘the great Apostle who used the Gaelic tongue when he first taught Christianity in Scotland so many centuries ago’.⁸³ It is clear, therefore, that Margaret Burnley Campbell understood the position of Gaelic as similar to other small-nation languages and as part of a group of Celtic languages, and that she recognised the fundamental importance of Gaelic education at all levels for the future of the language. She was also aware of the need for a higher profile for Gaelic as part of daily life in the Gàidhealtachd in particular and also that some form of economic regeneration was required in that area to prevent further dispersal of the Gaelic-speaking population. The subject that most obviously related to this last point was the question of land-ownership. Surprisingly, perhaps, for someone of her class, Margaret Burnley Campbell did address the matter, on one occasion at least, when speaking to the Glasgow Union of Women Workers on the subject of ‘Highland Industries’,⁸⁴ when she suggested that three things were necessary if ‘this fine race of people were to remain on their native soil’, the first being: ‘To amend the Highland

⁸¹ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach an Lochabar’, *OT*, 2 Jan 1909.

⁸² ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach: Mrs Burnley Campbell in Islay’, *OT*, 17 Feb 1912.

⁸³ ‘Address by Mrs Burnley Campbell’, *DG*, 8 (1912–13), 150–151 (151).

⁸⁴ ‘The Needs of the Highlands’, *OT*, 1 April 1911.

land laws'. Unfortunately the report of her address does not elaborate on exactly what she had in mind with respect to this, although her second point provided some detail: 'To improve the agriculture by such educative methods as the establishment of model crofts, and by the introduction of the co-operative system of farming such as prevailed in Denmark', and thirdly, she saw the need for 'other forms of remunerative occupations'. These remarks show she had an understanding of the economic issues that needed to be addressed to maintain a stable population in the Gaelic-speaking heartlands and was aware of ways in which other small countries were trying to tackle similar problems. From an ideological perspective, the theme Margaret Burnley Campbell most frequently emphasised was the importance of individualism as opposed to the uniformity that she saw as 'fatal to progress'. In her opening address at the Rothesay Mòd in 1908, for example, she concluded with:

Let us buy Gaelic books and wear hand-made tweeds, and in fact be guilty all round of preferring our own country, our own race, our own language, music, customs and products to any others. A narrow Chauvinism, some will say, but to me at any rate it appears nobler, more rational, and less selfish than the indifferent cosmopolitanism which is so marked a development of our so-called modern civilization.⁸⁵

In an article written to mark An Comunn Gàidhealach's 'coming of age' in 1912, she described her vision for a future Gaelic community, exhorting the overcoming of social demoralisation by rejecting foreign values and restoring linguistic pride 'once more':

[P]ray for the dawn of a brighter day when Celtic individualism may assert itself afresh, and dull uniformity to the standard of another race be regarded with the contempt it deserves. When restored self-respect shall have killed the unwritten law which proscribes Gaelic in public places, and the language which for so many decades has been banned and outlawed as a mark of inferiority shall once more assume its pride of place in the education and in the lives of the Gaels of Alba.⁸⁶

Margaret Burnley Campbell's antipathy to the cosmopolitan view reflected the discourse of cultural nationalism and a personal ideological trajectory that shades

⁸⁵ 'Appeal for Celtic Patriotism', *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 3.

⁸⁶ 'An Comunn – Its Membership', *DG*, 7 (1911–12), 192–193 (193).

between Individualist Liberalism and Romanticism,⁸⁷ in which her strong ethnocentric focus was presented as an antithesis to the modern state.

The Féill

One event in particular propelled the women in An Comunn Gàidhealach into the public limelight, albeit in a conventional female domain. Margaret Burnley Campbell offered to take on the major task of organising a grand fund-raising Féill when it was obvious that the prospect appeared impossibly daunting to the gentlemen who attended the Annual Business Meeting in 1906, including Dr Kenneth Campbell of the Oban branch, who suggested the idea in the first place. For Margaret Burnley Campbell, however, like many Victorian ladies of the middle and upper classes, the charity bazaar was familiar territory; a uniquely feminine institution that from early in the nineteenth century was recognised as a public space under female authority.⁸⁸ It was reported that:

The tone of the meeting became more than lukewarm [...] when Mrs Burnley Campbell graciously consented to become Convenor of the venture. [...] She accepted the doctor's idea, although she objected to its concrete expression by the word "Bazaar." The undertaking to which she was committing herself was for the benefit of the Gaelic people and their language, and she resolved it could not be called by a Persian name so long as the language she loves and works for contains a term more exact and much more comprehensive than "Bazaar".⁸⁹

While the ease with which the women involved were able to organise the Féill on such a grand scale seemed to take the men by surprise, it was the case that domestic efficiency, so much prized as a desirable feminine attribute, was often a complex management exercise, and in the case of 'Big House' women, this often entailed

⁸⁷ Both contain contradictory ideas: romanticism moved between the claims of individualism and the claims of communitarianism; and liberalism represented the democratic sense of the individual but also 'an elite layer of selves [...] to direct the masses'. For this discussion see Anne Janowitz, 'William Morris and the dialectic of romanticism' in *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 160–183. For discussion on the ideology of the cultural nationalist, see John Hutchinson, 'Re-interpreting Cultural Nationalism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 45 (1999), 392–407; and Hutchinson, 'Cultural nationalism, elite mobility and nation building: communitarian politics in modern Ireland', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38 (1987), 482–501.

⁸⁸ See Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 117.

⁸⁹ 'Editorial Chat', *DG*, 3 (1907–08), 29.

managing a raft of staff, and even a whole estate.⁹⁰ There is no doubt that the organisation of the Féill was seen as ‘women’s work’, but Margaret Burnley Campbell, with the authority of her role as convener, did not stick rigidly to the customary all-female designation of the bazaar and ‘resolved to give *gentlemen* as well as ladies the privilege of working hard to prepare a Féill worthy of the Gaelic race’.⁹¹

‘Féill A’ Chomuinn Ghaidhealaich’ which took place in the St Andrew’s Halls, Glasgow over three days in November 1907 was a text-book example of such an event, with a large cast of upper class and aristocratic ladies and gentlemen named in its support. H.R.H. Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, performed the opening ceremony on the first day, and would certainly have been the reason why many on the extensive list of patrons agreed to lend what was essentially tokenistic support. John Mackay in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane clearly concurred with the latter’s view regarding the degree of artistocratic influence, stating: ‘As you say everyone seems to have turned flunkey’, adding his own opinion that ‘Toff names won’t sell goods’.⁹²

The Féill was organised in stalls or ‘buithean’, each with a convener and committee, and representing different geographical areas or towns. Some stalls had a broader generic provenance such as ‘Buth Chairdean thar a’ Chuain’, or a specific focus, such as ‘Buth Leabhraichean agus Dhealbhan’. It was seen as a mark of authenticity and honour to have ‘native Gaelic speakers’ on the stalls. Winifred Parker boasted that five of her team on ‘Buth Leabhraichean agus Dhealbhan’ spoke Gaelic,⁹³ and on ‘Buth Chairdean thar a’ Chuain’ convened by Ysobel Campbell of Inverneill, it was reported that the Inverneill family nurse, Anna McAlpine, was ‘a capital saleswoman, and spoke only Gaelic’.⁹⁴ On some stalls Highland Industries were displayed with ‘native’ goods from the colonies, ‘countless Maori curios’ alongside ‘St Kilda curios’,⁹⁵ for example, suggesting both sources as ‘primitive others’, while the proliferation of ‘exotic’ items, including skins of rhinoceros,

⁹⁰ See Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes*, rev. edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 313.

⁹¹ ‘Editorial Chat’, *DG*, 2 (1907–08), 29.

⁹² J. Mackay to Malcolm MacFarlane, [no date, 1907], NLS Acc.9736/132.

⁹³ ‘Impressions of the Féill’, *DG*, 2 (1907–08), 63–73 (64).

⁹⁴ ‘Impressions of the Féill’, 69.

⁹⁵ ‘Impressions of the Féill’, 69.

springbok and yak, indicates, uncomfortably from today's perspective, the colonial exploitation of other cultures and their natural environments.

An element of display and exhibition was frequently a feature of the more prestigious Victorian bazaars, the latter element designated as an area for male involvement. 'Féill a' Chomuinn Ghaidhealaich' followed this pattern with an Exhibition of 'Celtic and Jacobite Relics' under the supervision of the Celtic scholar, Dr George Henderson (1866–1912),⁹⁶ while the display element was provided by 'An Clachan', a mock Highland village that aimed to represent 'the home-life of the Highlander'.⁹⁷ In reality what 'An Clachan' represented was an idealised hamlet, where time was suspended in a continual contented moment and where potato blight, overcrowding and lack of sanitation never threatened to spoil the show. Making a connection between the product and the people who produced it was an important aspect of marketing 'Home Industries', and that was the philosophy behind the creation of 'An Clachan' where hand-spun, hand-woven and hand-knitted items, as well as crafts such as basketwork and carved goods, could be seen in the domestic context of their production. The Scottish Home Industries' Stall at the Victorian Era Exhibition at Earl's Court in 1897 had included similar mock 'crofters' cottages', following earlier examples of reconstructed villages to display Irish industries, and included 'authentic native women' who demonstrated various aspects of their hand-work.⁹⁸ Likewise, the official handbook of 'Féill A' Chomuinn Ghaidhealaich' informed the visiting public with regard to 'An Clachan' that:

The dwellings [...] with their moss-covered thatched roofs and dry stone walls [are] internally furnished with quaint fittings, while the Gaelic-speaking inmates will be engaged in their usual daily tasks, such as spinning, weaving, knitting, carding, grinding corn, etc.⁹⁹

'An Clachan' was under the direction of Mrs Cairns MacLachlan, who was involved in a number of areas of female philanthropy, including Highland Home Industries.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ See this chapter, 60; & chapter 6, 194.

⁹⁷ 'Impressions of the Féill', *DG*, 2 (1907–08), 63–73 (72).

⁹⁸ The 'Donegal Village', for example, at the Irish Exhibition in Olympia in 1888. See Janice Hellend, 'Rural Women and Urban Extravagance in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Rural History*, 13 (2002), 179–197; and Janice Hellend, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries 1880–1914*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007).

⁹⁹ 'An Clachan: The Highland Village', *Souvenir and Handbook of Féill A' Chomuinn Ghaidhealaich* (Glasgow: J. M. Munro, 1907), 72.

¹⁰⁰ 'Our Portrait Gallery: Mrs Cairns MacLachlan', *DG*, 7 (1911–1912), 59.

While she does not appear to have had Gaelic or Highland connections and possibly had little or no experience of the poor living conditions in many parts of the Gàidhealtachd at the time, her all-male committee included Professor Magnus MacLean and Henry Whyte, both of whom came originally from humble homes in Skye and Argyll respectively. ‘An Clachan’, therefore, in contrast to the examples at the London exhibitions, was informed not only by a romantic ‘external’ perception but also the nostalgic, ‘rose-tinted’ recollections of the displaced, upwardly-mobile urban Gael.

While most of the long list of female patrons supporting the Féill would probably not be seen in a Gaelic arena again, for some women who were genuinely interested in the Gaelic cause, the event provided an opening for individual enterprises. A particular example of this was the production of three publications that were especially compiled to sell at the Féill, part of the efforts of ‘Buth Leabhraichean agus Dhealbhan’, and put together by a group of women from different cultural networks, who could all be recognised as aspiring ‘modern women’. Winifred Parker edited *Na Daoine Sidhe is Uirsgeulan Eile*,¹⁰¹ a book of three folk-tales published in Gaelic only, with a bi-lingual version published the following year. Both were funded by Thomas Nelson and Sons as a donation to the Féill, and were illustrated in colour by Katherine Cameron, RSW,¹⁰² and Rachel Ainslie Grant Duff.¹⁰³ Winifred Parker, along with Mabel C. Forbes, also organised and compiled *Sop as Gach Seid (A Straw from Every Sheaf)*,¹⁰⁴ described as ‘a collection of favourite quotations, in Gaelic, English and other Languages, from Prose and Poetry’. The third book, *Am Bolg Solair: The Pedlar’s Pack*,¹⁰⁵ edited by Elma Story (1866–1941),¹⁰⁶ was described as ‘an artistic and literary book

¹⁰¹ Una, Inghean Fhir na Pairce [Winifred Parker], ed., *Na Daoine Sidhe is Uirsgeulan Eile* (Glasgow: Archibald Sinclair, 1907).

¹⁰² Katherine Cameron (1874–1965), sister of the better known artist D. Y. Cameron, although she was a skilled watercolour artist in her own right having studied at Glasgow School of Art where she was one of a dynamic group of female artists whose significance has until comparatively recently been overlooked in favour of the Glasgow Boys. See Ailsa Tanner, ‘Painters of Flowers’, in *‘Glasgow Girls’: Women in Art and Design, 1880–1920*, ed. by Jude Burkhauser (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishing, 1990), 220–26 (220).

¹⁰³ She also illustrated George Henderson’s translation of ‘The Celtic Dragon Myth’. See George Henderson, *The Celtic Dragon Myth* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1911).

¹⁰⁴ Published by Archibald Sinclair of Glasgow in 1907, the book is hand bound, with the pages of good quality paper, punched and tied.

¹⁰⁵ *Am Bolg Solair: The Pedlar’s Pack*, ed. by Elma Story (Glasgow: Archibald Sinclair, 1907).

¹⁰⁶ Daughter of Robert Story, Principal of Glasgow University from 1898 until his death in 1907.

containing contributions from well-known authors and artists',¹⁰⁷ Dr George Henderson was again involved with this publication, his 'assistance with proofs' acknowledged by the editor in her Introduction.¹⁰⁸ The high social profile of the Féill and its diverse activities was a means of instigating interaction between different intellectual and artistic networks, and within that interchange, as the examples above illustrate, bonds of friendship and support between like-minded women were evident.

The Féill resulted in over £8000 for An Comunn Gàidhealach coffers, a little short of the target of £10,000 but still a remarkable sum for the time, and indeed even more so when considered at its current estimated value of between £600,000 and £800,000. The sum was invested and administered under the supervision of a committee of Trustees and it created a reasonably sound financial footing for the organisation for the first time in its existence.

'An Clachan' 1911

'An Clachan' was resurrected four years later in 1911 in the much bigger arena of the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry, where it was viewed by a much larger number of people from a wider geographical representation.¹⁰⁹ This exhibition was held in Kelvingrove Park in Glasgow over six months for the purpose of funding a Chair of Scottish history and literature at Glasgow University, an aim that was successfully achieved, and the historical dimension was therefore a strong thread in the various displays.¹¹⁰ In contrast to the cramped hall at the Féill, 'An Clachan' at the 1911 Exhibition was able to spread itself over two acres on the banks of the River Kelvin. It is probable that the opportunity to reproduce 'An Clachan' in this arena was facilitated through Mrs Cairns MacLachlan's involvement with the Scottish Patriotic Association, senior members of which were influential in the organising of the Scottish Exhibition.¹¹¹ The original idea, however, is attributed to

¹⁰⁷ 'Féill A' Chomuinn Ghaidhealaich: Progress of Arrangements', *OWN*, April 1907.

¹⁰⁸ Henderson was lecturing in Celtic at Glasgow University at this time.

¹⁰⁹ Over 9.3 million people visited the exhibition as a whole.

¹¹⁰ 'The University of Glasgow Story',
<<http://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/biography/?id=CB0018&type=C>>
[Accessed 27 March 2013]

¹¹¹ Mrs Cairns MacLachlan was a Vice-president of the Association. See 'Mrs Cairns MacLachlan', *DG*, 7 (1911–1912), 59.

Margaret Burnley Campbell¹¹² who convened the Clachan Executive, with Mrs Cairns MacLachlan as organising secretary. Unlike the Féill, there were very few women prominent in the organising committees for the Scottish Exhibition as a whole. Another important difference, apart from that of scale and duration, was that the 1911 Exhibition was concerned with presenting Scottish history and culture in general and from the particular perspective of those who were responsible for its planning.¹¹³ Margaret Burnley Campbell, from her cultural nationalist perspective, had her own vision for the project:

‘An Clachan’ is intended to make the British people realise more clearly that the Scottish Gaels are a small, bilingual nation – an integral part of themselves no doubt – but who possess a real, living, spoken and written language of their own which is of great antiquity and scientific importance, and who also retain many interesting national distinctions of race, character and custom. ‘An Clachan’ makes a strong plea for the preservation of all these things especially through the means of bilingual education. [...] ‘An Clachan’ craves that fair play may be given to the genius of the Highlands to develop on its own lines in the future, on the land from which it has drawn its inspiration in the past.¹¹⁴

Her focus on the development of a ‘future’ collective Gaelic experience can be contrasted with the more limiting view of Sir Donald Macalister, Principal of Glasgow University and a Gaelic speaker, who spoke at the opening ceremony:

[The Committee] desire[s] in the first place to bring home clearly and strongly to those who are strangers, and to recall appealingly to those who are not strangers, the characteristic and often pathetic features of the environment in which the Highland peasantry are born and bred, and live their hard but not unkindly lives. [...] The Sassenach, and the visitor from overseas, will carry from the Clachan a truer idea of the humble homes of the dwellers in Highland glens and islands than they can from printed page or pictured illustration.¹¹⁵

Principal Macalister did however seek to elevate the concept of ‘An Clachan’ above some of the other exhibits, stressing that it aimed ‘at something beyond the

¹¹² The *OT* described her as ‘the guiding and inspiring force behind the undertaking from the beginning’. (‘The Exhibition Clachan’, *OT*, 6 May 1911).

¹¹³ The Conservative domination of the committee is discussed by Neil Curtis in: ‘Exhibiting Scottish Identity’, a lecture given to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on 31 Jan 2012. <<http://www.screencast.com/t/VwEa8aOz>> [accessed: 12 April 2012]

¹¹⁴ ‘The Exhibition Clachan’, *OT*, 6 May 1911.

¹¹⁵ ‘An Clachan’, *DG*, 6 (1910–11), 135.

gratification of mere curiosity', and that 'they wish[ed] to inform and stimulate the interest of the visitor in the Highlands and [its] inhabitants, as well as to entertain him by a novel and picturesque sight'.¹¹⁶ In stressing that 'An Clachan' was not in any way a spectacle for the curious, although at the same time suggesting an entertainment factor, reflected the contradiction of its location in close proximity to the West African and the Lapp 'villages', in the area of the Exhibition designated as 'Entertainment'. The connotations that can be drawn from the siting of the Highland village next to examples of what at the time were considered 'primitive' cultures were not lost on one member of An Comunn, Angus Henderson, who in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane wrote:

I have not been in Glasgow since the exhibition opened but am informed that the Highland Clachan is a centre of no small attraction & compares favourably with the gypsy camps, the Kaffir Kraals, the Lapp Villages and the other representations of primitive social systems.¹¹⁷

It would seem probable that an anonymous letter in a similar vein in the *OT* in January 1912, responding to the possibility of 'An Clachan' being further exhibited in London was from the same author. Referring to 'the exploitation of Gaidheil in like manner as African, Lapps, etc', the letter continued:

[The] excuse is an endeavour to raise funds wherewith to further the industries, and promote the study of the language and music of the Gaidheil. Laudable objects, but do [they] [...] justify means which place our race, in the eyes of those who know no better, on a par with the lowest African tribes.¹¹⁸

The strong reaction Angus Henderson expressed with regard to 'An Clachan' and the racial contradictions he articulates should be understood in the context of the theories of race being propounded at the turn of the century suggesting an evolutionary gulf between 'backward' non-western and 'advanced' western races,¹¹⁹ but it also needs

¹¹⁶ 'An Clachan', *DG*, 135.

¹¹⁷ Angus Henderson to Malcolm MacFarlane, 24 May 1911. NLS Acc. 9736/17. Angus Henderson (1866–1937) was a journalist who edited the Gaelic newspaper *Alba* (1908–09), and was politically rather than culturally focused in his support for Gaelic.

¹¹⁸ 'Proposed London Clachan', Letter to the Editor of the *Oban Times*, 8 Jan 1912.

¹¹⁹ For this discussion in an Irish context see Brian Ó Conchubhair, *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge: Darwin, an Athbheochan agus Smaointeoireacht na hEorpa* (Indreabhán: An Clóchomhar, 2009), chapter 3 in particular. See also Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870–1914*, 233–237; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire 1875–1914*, (London: Abacus, 1994), 79–81.

to be borne in mind that it was not so many decades before that the Highland Gael was being regularly described in terms associated with the former category.¹²⁰ Angus Henderson may perhaps have been familiar with the views of the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox, who referred in his book *The Races of Men*, published in 1850, to the ‘Caledonian Celt’ and ‘the dark and filthy hovel [he] never sought to purify’, to give but one example of such discourse.¹²¹ However, even in more balanced commentaries, and particularly through the lens of Victorian photographers, the thatched homes of Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were frequently featured as a signifier of the ‘otherness’ of the Gaelic-speaking people,¹²² whether derided (huts) or romanticized (cottages). Despite the architectural accuracy and pristine presentation of the houses in ‘An Clachan’,¹²³ which included the modern ‘white’ house alongside examples of the traditional black house, the fact that they were presented as spectacle was enough to provoke Angus Henderson’s critical protest. Many Gaels, however, were unperturbed and in fact for the duration of the Exhibition the village was a focal point for Gaelic activity and social conviviality amongst Glasgow Gaels:

Tha [An Clachan] ’na àite coinneimh a tha fìor thaitneach do na Gaidheil, agus gheibhear grunnain dhiubh thall ’s a bhos gach feasgar a’ cur seachad na h-ùine an cuideachd a’ chèile. An so tha sean chàirdeas air ath-nuadhachadh, agus càirdeas ur air a dhealbh; an so tha cothrom aig Gaidheil baile ’us dùthcha a bhi tighinn an taice a’ chèile o àm gu àm ann an conaltradh càirdeil, a’ faotainn agus a’ tabhairt naigheachdan na tìre.¹²⁴

When ‘Clachan na Caoil-Abhainne’ came to an end, the same publication lamented its passing: ‘[I]s iomadh h-aon a bhitheas ag ionndrainn nan coinneamhan caidreach, bàigheil, carthannach a bha aca’.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ See Krisztina Fenyő, *Contempt, Sympathy and Romance: Lowland perceptions of the Highlands and the clearances during the famine years, 1845-1855*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000)

¹²¹ Fenyő, *Contempt, Sympathy and Romance*, 41.

¹²² *The Scots Pictorial*, a Society magazine, for example, featured (6 Oct 1906) a full-page spread of six pictures of black houses in South Uist and Harris under the heading ‘Where Some of Our Countrymen Live’.

¹²³ The architect of ‘An Clachan’ was Colin Sinclair (1879–1957) who made a particular study of Highland architecture, publishing *The Thatched Houses of the Old Highlands* (Oliver & Boyd) in 1953.

¹²⁴ ‘Seanachas mu ’n Chlachan’, *DG*, 6 (1910–11), 165.

¹²⁵ ‘Sealladh Mòr Albannach Ghlascho 1911’, *DG*, 7 (1911–12), 21.

While Angus Henderson acknowledged in his letter, ‘the energy displayed by the secretary to the Glasgow Clachan and her assistants’,¹²⁶ he made no mention of the convenor, which suggests that his criticism was particularly aimed at Margaret Burnley Campbell. There is no doubt that she was the force behind the project as evident in the detailed article she wrote prior to the opening of ‘An Clachan’, in which she elaborated on her vision for it. Much of what she was suggesting was informed and forward looking, understanding as she clearly did that more substantial industries were required alongside ‘home’ industries, ‘to give labour and wages without obliging all the young men and women to go South to “earn”’,¹²⁷ giving as examples the Skye diatomite and marble quarries, the Raasay ironworks and the large slate quarries of Easdale and Ballachulish. In addition she highlighted possibilities in producing eggs, honey and cheese and the need for practical training to develop these areas, and also extending home-industries beyond tweeds and knitwear, especially where the natural materials were readily available, pointing, as an example, to the basket-making of the Skye Osier Company using local willow that grew well in the damp climate. ‘An Clachan’, however, suggested a less progressive view. From a gender perspective, the women who predominated as workers in the exhibit were presented in traditional roles and dressed in old-fashioned clothing, untouched, as it were, by modern life. Indeed as Margaret Burnley Campbell had intimated, there were ‘Gaelic-speaking maidens in home-spun and tartan’ and ‘women sellers attired in the picturesque dress worn by Highland ladies till about 200 years ago’.¹²⁸ Thus ‘An Clachan’ while purporting to represent a view of ‘Highland life as it is lived today’,¹²⁹ in fact authenticated a picture of a pre-modern peasant community stuck in an atemporal groove, and women in particular were given a prominent place in that representation.¹³⁰ In this respect, it endorsed an understanding of the ‘bana-Ghaidheal’ as outside processes of history and social change, a view that was already in circulation, promoted by Victorian photographers

¹²⁶ ‘Sealladh Mòr Albannach Ghlascho 1911’, *DG*, 7 (1911–12), 21.

¹²⁷ Margaret Burnley Campbell, ‘An Clachan’, *DG*, 6 (1910–11), 102–04 (103).

¹²⁸ ‘An Clachan’, *DG*, 6, 103.

¹²⁹ ‘An Clachan’, *DG*, 6, 102.

¹³⁰ Neil Curtis, who has done research on the 1911 Exhibition as a whole, contrasts the placing of ‘An Clachan’ in the ‘entertainment’ section with that of the ‘Auld Toon’, a reconstructed Lowland town, in the ‘historical’ section, the latter clearly presented as a historical reconstruction, whereas the former was seen as ‘a surviving primitive community’. See note 114, above.

and the continuing influence of the romantic cameos of the bonnie ‘Highland Lass’ penned by Burns, Wordsworth, Scott and others.¹³¹ In addition, within Gaelic culture itself, many of the songs of the nineteenth century also portray an ideal femininity that did not reflect the reality of the lives women were actually leading. However, the positive response to ‘An Clachan’ by many Gaels should not be underestimated, partly a nostalgic indulgence from the perspective of the dislocation of their lives in the city,¹³² but also genuine enjoyment of a social and cultural space where Gaelic was dominant.¹³³ While Angus Henderson was clearly uncomfortable with the idea of exhibiting Gaelic society and culture in such a way, and in proximity with other cultures that were perceived as primitively exotic, this was at the time a minority view.¹³⁴

Highland Home Industries

The surplus profits from ‘An Clachan’ were divided between An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Co-operative Council of Highland Home Industries. The latter body was formed as a direct outcome of the Féill as was described in an article co-written by Ella Carmichael in 1927 on the history of Highland Home Industries. The authors explain that it was in light of the quantity of home industries that had been gathered for the Féill and the number of different groups involved from various areas, that E. K. Carmichael¹³⁵ put forward a scheme to bring together all the small groups and associations, including the Arts and Industries Committee of An Comunn Gàidhealach, under one umbrella body. Two years later in 1909, at a conference

¹³¹ An example of this imagery from a poem entitled ‘A Highland Girl’: ‘Unspoiled child of nature, God-gifted, lore-laden; / So perfect in form and bewitching in face, / With the wisdom of years and the heart of a maiden, She holds all the charm and the strength of her race. Roger Quin, ‘A Highland Girl’, *DG*, 9 (1913–14), 142. Tricia Cusack discusses (in the context of the early Irish state following independence) the ideological view of women as set apart from modern society and preservers of an imagined ‘organic community’ in ‘Janus and gender: Women and the Nation’s Backward Look’, *Nations and Nationalisms*, 6:4 (2000), 541–561.

¹³² Although this can be seen as a specific reaction (‘cianalas’) from the Gaelic diaspora to ‘An Clachan’, there was a strong current of nostalgia in this period, a response to the accelerated nature of industrialisation and social change, with women in particular frequently constructed as part of the ‘backward look’. See Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 40–41.

¹³³ Gaelic was designated as ‘the language of the Clachan’.

¹³⁴ ‘An Clachan’ under the same architect was further exhibited at the Empire Exhibition held in Glasgow in 1934, and while the Official Guide made it clear that this was an ‘old world’ clachan and that houses in the Highlands were now ‘equipped with all those amenities which are associated with modern standards of living’ it was still, however, portraying Highland women as ‘comely Gaelic-speaking maids’ engaged in traditional domestic tasks. See *An Clachan: The Highland Village*, (Glasgow: McCorquodale, 1938).

¹³⁵ Eoghan Kenneth Carmichael, brother of Ella Carmichael.

organised by the Art and Industry Committee and presided over by Margaret Burnley Campbell, this plan was brought to fruition: 'to enable all existing industries, associations, and classes to work hand in hand without overlapping [...] to devise means by which the whole system may be placed on a more national, artistic and business footing'.¹³⁶ Thus the Co-operative Council of Highland Home Industries was formed, and in 1914, 'by means of the Clachan [1911] fund with a similar sum loaned by friends, the organisation was able to purchase the stock and good-will of the Scottish Home Industries Association'.¹³⁷ It is clear, therefore, that Margaret Burnley Campbell's vision for the Féill and the Clachan to bring practical benefits to those involved in producing home industries in the Highlands did eventually come to pass.

With the advent of the new organisation, Highland Home Industries finally detached itself from the control of aristocratic philanthropists. Certainly the involvement of female elites such as Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland, had brought the Home Industries movement in the Highlands to the attention of wealthy aristocratic women, many of whom had no understanding of the area beyond the Glorious Twelfth and the County Balls. Ironical as it is in the light of Highland history that it should be a Duchess of Sutherland who was the driving-force in an enterprise seeking to alleviate the economic situation of crofting families 'who have, alas! no better means of earning a proper wage and eking out a precarious living',¹³⁸ she did facilitate access to a glamorous market that the makers of the tweeds would not otherwise have reached.¹³⁹ It was, however, a clientele that was continually offered a romantic view of rural poverty that subsumed Gaelic-speaking women and girls in limited roles, however well-intentioned:

¹³⁶ 'Highland Home Industries', *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 95–96 (95).

¹³⁷ Mrs W. J. Watson and Miss J. D. Bruce, 'Highland Home Industries' in *Voices from the Hills*, ed. by John MacDonald, (Glasgow: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1927), 180–83 (180). The Scottish Home Industries Association was started by Anne, Duchess of Sutherland in 1890, and continued with her daughter-in-law Lady Millicent St Clair Erskine, wife of Cromartie Sutherland-Leveson-Gower (1851–1913) who became 4th Duke of Sutherland in 1892. An earlier initiative was started by Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, establishing a short-lived 'Industrial Society' based in Golspie in response to the potato famine of the 1840s.

¹³⁸ Duchess of Sutherland, 'Highland Home Industries', *Celtic Monthly*, 9 (1901), 16.

¹³⁹ It is notable that the producers of Harris Tweed today are still targeting the glamour end of the fashion market with multi-national companies like Nike and world celebrities such as Madonna as customers, while still marketing their product with similar imagery to that of the original Highland Home Industries, suggesting its production as an 'antidote to a society gripped by globalisation and mass-production'. <<http://www.harristweedandknitwear.co.uk/>> [Accessed 20 June 2012]. See also 'Celebrity demand stretches tweed weavers', *The Independent*, 12 March 2005.

Is it better that a girl in the Hebrides should grow up to learn her mother's craft of spinning and dying and weaving [...] and living in a cottage in the air of the sea and isles, or that she should go to Glasgow to be a factory hand, living up a 'close', drinking tea four times a day, wearing flashy hats on Sundays, trained only to feed a machine, till she settles down, it may be, to raise a weakly family for the same life.¹⁴⁰

In contrast, although written, certainly, some twenty-five years later, Ella Carmichael articulated more positive examples of the higher ambitions and self-improving initiatives that the Highland Home Industries scheme might facilitate:

[M]any a hard-working mother by means of her industry has laid by enough to supplement bursaries and to send her clever boy or girl to college, and many a smallholder [...] has been able to complete the equipment of his new and more fertile croft by means of the "stocking-foot" of his thrifty wife.¹⁴¹

The female-led Arts and Industries Committee of An Comunn continued to organise sales of home industries during the Mòd and at other times, and in 1913 established a depot for the sale of tweeds in Glasgow.¹⁴² Margaret Burnley Campbell was particularly adamant that home-workers should be paid for their goods upfront and not on a 'sale or return' basis, negotiating loans from the Finance Committee which were later paid back when the goods were sold. Thus in contrast to early aristocrat-led philanthropic initiatives, An Comunn Gàidhealach viewed its involvement with Home Industries as a form of cultural enterprise that would give women in particular in the rural Gàidhealtachd an opportunity of contributing to the family income. Ella Carmichael, as her comment above shows, saw this as a specifically female contribution towards a family sustaining a more independent future for themselves and their children.

Advocates for Gaelic

In promoting the use of Gaelic in all aspects of An Comunn Gàidhealach business, it was often women who were most zealous, despite the fact that they were

¹⁴⁰ Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland, 'A Story of a Highland Industry', *New Liberal Review*. (Reprinted in the *OT*, 17 Aug 1901).

¹⁴¹ MacDonald, *Voices from the Hills*, 181.

¹⁴² 'Art and Industries', *DG*, 8 (1912–13), 68.

predominantly learners of the language. Three women in particular made considerable efforts to gain a reasonable competence in Gaelic, mostly through their own initiative rather than attending formal classes. Lettice Macnaghten, for example, arranged an informal correspondence course with Malcolm MacFarlane, where she wrote to him in Gaelic and asked that he would correct and explain her mistakes.¹⁴³ Margaret Burnley Campbell and Winifred Parker began learning Gaelic together when the Parkers lived for a time in 1902 in Craig Lodge on the Ormidale estate, taking Gaelic lessons from the local minister,¹⁴⁴ and in June 1905 they both went for a month to Eriskay to make progress with the language.¹⁴⁵ Winifred Parker also took lessons from Dr George Henderson, and in 1908, Margaret Burnley Campbell engaged Katherine Whyte Grant for two months ‘to speak Gaelic only’ to both herself and her daughter.¹⁴⁶ Winifred Parker was described as: ‘an excellent linguist’ and ‘among many accomplishments she acquired a knowledge of Gaelic which she can speak, read and write fluently’.¹⁴⁷ Margaret Burnley Campbell was sufficiently confident to use the language on a public platform, although usually only in her preliminary remarks. She did, however, give a lecture entirely in Gaelic to Céilidh nan Gaidheal¹⁴⁸ in Glasgow in 1905, described in a report as a real encouragement to others who were learning the language.¹⁴⁹

Margaret Burnley Campbell also asserted her authority in support of the language in different ways on An Comunn’s Executive Council. At the annual general meeting in 1911, she sought a stipulation that ‘at least half of each publication shall be in Gaelic’, stating that: ‘It was their business to publish Gaelic and to spend all they could on Gaelic’. In this proposal she was roundly defeated, causing her to declare that ‘the Executive has made a most regrettable decision’.¹⁵⁰ Surprisingly it was not until the Annual Meeting of 1913 that a motion was put forward that the minutes of Executive meetings should be written in Gaelic, which

¹⁴³ Letters in NLS Acc. 9736/135

¹⁴⁴ ‘Our Portrait Gallery: Miss Winifred M. Parker, Fairlie’, *DG*, 4 (1908-09), 67–68.

¹⁴⁵ Ella Carmichael, Edinburgh, to Father Allan McDonald, 16 June 1905. Canna House Letters.

¹⁴⁶ K. W. Grant, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 27 Feb 1908. NLS Acc. 9736/14. See chapter 3, 90.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Announcement of Miss Winifred Parker’s Marriage’, *DG*, 4 (1908-09), 15.

¹⁴⁸ A Gaelic group formed in Glasgow in 1896; it was unusual in insisting that all its meetings were conducted in Gaelic.

¹⁴⁹ ‘A’ Ghàidhlig anns na Sgoilean’, *DG*, 1 (1905-06), 54.

¹⁵⁰ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach’, *OT*, 24 June 1911.

was duly agreed. This was again proposed by Margaret Burnley Campbell.¹⁵¹ She also initiated opportunities to support Gaelic-speakers in the wider community. In 1913, for example, she established an ‘Employment Bureau’ for Gaelic-speakers in Glasgow, aiming to bring together Gaelic-speakers seeking employment and potential employers who would prefer to engage Gaelic-speakers. With the commencement of war in 1914, she organised and collected enough money through local branches and affiliated societies to establish a ‘Comunn Ward’ at the new Glasgow Military Hospital at Springburn, in order that wounded Gaelic-speaking soldiers would be cared for in ‘a Gaelic atmosphere [...] conducive to their ultimate recovery’.¹⁵² It was probably not the time nor the context to promote specific Gaelic loyalty in this way, and as a result An Comunn was accused of favouring ‘propaganda’ over compassion, at a time when the Red Cross was caring for all soldiers according to their need and, as it was reported, ‘many [...] had a good strain of Celtic blood in their veins’.¹⁵³ While the general sentiment behind the idea of a Gaelic ward was well-intentioned, it could have been handled with more sensitivity. It does however illustrate Margaret Burnley Campbell’s individual focus and single-mindedness towards Gaelic, as will be explored in more detail with regard to Gaelic education in chapter 3.

Chapter Conclusions

In considering the participation and contribution of women across the spectrum of An Comunn Gàidhealach’s cultural remit in the first two decades of the twentieth century, this chapter has described a small but committed and influential group of women. This assessment is corroborated in an article published in 1942, at the time of the death of Miss Farquharson of Invercauld and Lady Elspeth Campbell within a week or two of each other, which reflected on ‘a group of notable women who, a generation ago, were enthusiastically active in the work of An Comunn [...] inspired by a deep and sincere love of Gaelic, its literature and its music’.¹⁵⁴ The article went on to summarise the work of Mrs Burnley Campbell, Mrs E. C. Watson, Lady Helen Stewart Murray, Miss MacGregor of MacGregor, Miss Kate Fraser and

¹⁵¹ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach: Annual Meeting’, *DG*, 9 (1913–14), 10.

¹⁵² ‘Special Meeting of An Comunn Gaidhealach Executive’, *DG*, 12 (1916–17), 20–21.

¹⁵³ ‘Special Meeting of An Comunn Gaidhealach Executive’, *DG*, 12 (1916–17), 20–21.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Gan Cuimhneachadh ’s ’gan Ionndrain’, *AG*, 38 (1942–43), 30–31 (30).

Miss Juliet MacDonald, adding that: ‘others, co-workers with these in the same spirit of disinterested devotion [...] are happily still with us’.¹⁵⁵ The advent of women in An Comunn came after the organisation had been functioning as a somewhat conservative, all-male hegemony for over ten years and also at a time when women were actively challenging a similar bias of authority in many areas of public life. While there were tensions of gender and class, the greater challenge for the women was negotiating the turbulent water between oppositional male factions, seeking to diffuse the acrimony that they perceived as an unhelpful distraction from their united efforts for the Gaelic cause.

It was a remarkably modern and unexpected decision to elect a female president in 1907 and it proved to be an auspicious choice. When Margaret Burnley Campbell stood down from the position of president in 1909, tribute was paid to her time in office, remarking that: ‘had it not been for [her] enthusiasm and untiring energy and tact and social influence, they would not now be the fortunate possessors of an endowment fund amounting to about £7000 [and] that in itself should have the effect of sending down her name in the history of An Comunn Gaidhealach’.¹⁵⁶ In 1934, when she received an MBE in the King’s Birthday Honours for ‘services rendered to the Gaelic cause’, reports likewise focused on the ‘solid financial foundation’ she achieved for the organisation through the success of the Féill.¹⁵⁷ Without a doubt, it was her organisational ability and attention to detail, as well as her utilising of the social networks that were open to her on account of her class, that ensured the success of the Féill in 1907, and ‘An Clachan’ in 1911. However, her influence in An Comunn went well beyond the financial success of these two events, and as the next chapter will show, included her promotion of the effective teaching of Gaelic in schools, as well as the needs of adult learners.

While it was the case that all the women highlighted in this chapter enjoyed, to different degrees, privileged social circumstances which allowed them to participate in An Comunn Gàidhealach to the extent they did, it is important to see them as individuals coming to the Gaelic arena with the experience and perspectives of their individual backgrounds. Winifred Parker, for example, stated that she

¹⁵⁵ ‘Gan Cuimhneachadh ’s ’gan Ionndrain’, *AG*, 38 (1942), 31. ‘Others’ probably refers to Winifred Parker, Ysobel Campbell, and Lettice Macnaghten.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Highland Mod’, *Scotsman*, 27 Sept 1909.

¹⁵⁷ ‘The King’s Birthday Honours’, *OT*, 9 June 1934.

remembered as a child ‘rebellious inwardly when she heard the despairing verdict that Gaelic was bound to die’.¹⁵⁸ There was, however, a degree of mutual support and interaction between all the women, and this female interface extended on occasion to wider artistic and intellectual networks, and importantly to Pan-Celtic delegates. The intricacies of these different networks will emerge as an important thread in the chapters that follow.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Our Portrait Gallery: Miss Winifred M. Parker’, *DG*, 3 (1908-09) 67–68 (67).



Plate 1: Margaret Burnley Campbell, 1890. (Lady Henrietta Gilmour Collection, LHG-2-33)

Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Library.



The elderly lady in the group is Miss Murray MacGregor of MacGregor
On her left is Mrs. Burnley Campbell, President of the Mod

Teaching the Mother-Tongue: Women and Gaelic Education

Mothers are generally ambitious for their children, and they should realize that a knowledge of Gaelic as well as of English gives them two chances instead of one.¹

As Convenor of the Propaganda Committee, Mrs Burnley Campbell also reported that the Committee were considering a proposal to hold a conference of bi-lingual teachers engaged in Highland schools [...] for the purpose of exchanging views and discovering if possible the best means of introducing and encouraging the teaching of Gaelic in Highland schools.²

While the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act contained little to support Gaelic in the education system, the Act did open new opportunities for women in two important areas; firstly, it was ‘a historic turning point in the feminisation of teaching’, with the result that within ten years of its enactment the majority of teachers in elementary schools in Scotland were women,³ and secondly, it created locally elected school boards which women were eligible to serve on and to vote for on equal terms with men. Both of these circumstances offered individual women who had an interest in promoting Gaelic within the education system a narrow window of opportunity to further this aim, and although they could be overruled by the opposition of headmasters or other school board members, nevertheless a small number of women did actively champion Gaelic both on school boards and as teachers.

¹ E. C. Carmichael, ‘Some Things Women Can Do’, *DG*, 1 (1906–07) 8–10 (9).

² ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach: Executive Meeting’, *OT*, 11 Nov 1911.

³ Helen Corr, ‘Dominies and Domination: School Teachers, Masculinity and Women in 19th century Scotland’, *History Workshop Journal*, 40 (1995), 150–164 (154). Corr states (155) that by 1881 there were 8000 women teachers to approximately 5000 men in primary education in Scotland. This ‘feminization’ was numerical, however, and did not mean that women had more power within the education system.

Addressing the neglect of Gaelic in the education system was a central strand of Gaelic activism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the wake of the failure of various Education Acts to accommodate the needs of Gaelic, a challenge that has continued to engage Gaelic activists to the present day. Political lobbying tended to exclude women who, since they did not have the parliamentary vote, were seen as being irrelevant to the world of formal politics. However, for the women who took up official positions on the education committee of An Comunn Gaidhealach, for example, their active engagement with Gaelic education campaigns took them very close to the political process. In addition to engaging with Gaelic education on a public platform as teachers, school board members and with An Comunn, women were also considered to have an influential position as educators within the family and community. This chapter will, therefore, examine the involvement and influence of women in promoting Gaelic across a number of different educational contexts, both formal and informal. To begin with, some contextual background is necessary: firstly to give an overview of the general position of Gaelic education in the nineteenth century; and secondly to highlight the importance of the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act with reference to women and Gaelic.

Gaelic Education in the Nineteenth Century

Although education in the Gàidhealtachd in the nineteenth century prior to the 1872 Act varied considerably in provision, ethos and quality – a mix of parochial and church schools, charitable schools run by Gaelic School Societies, industrial schools and privately run estate schools – there was a recognition that Gaelic was a necessary part of the system.⁴ While the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, which began this educational mission to the Gàidhealtachd in the eighteenth century, were initially opposed to the use of Gaelic, they soon realised that to try and teach the Christian faith to monolingual Gaelic-speakers through the alien tongue of English was ineffective, and they had a change of policy. This view helped to encourage the translations of the Bible into Scottish Gaelic, which in turn

⁴ Donald Meek, 'Introduction' in *Caran an t-Saoghail*, ed. by Donald Meek, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), xiii–xli (xxi).

became an important tool in promoting Gaelic literacy.⁵ While it was certainly the case in this period that the quality and availability of formal schooling was uneven, examples of scholars such as Professor Donald MacKinnon from Colonsay and numerous members of the clergy as well as others outwith the academic sphere (Donald MacEachern, Neil MacLeod, Henry and John Whyte for example) point to the education in some local schools in both English and Gaelic being of a good standard. School was not by any means always a positive educational experience for the Gaelic-speaker and there is evidence of pupils being severely punished and ridiculed for speaking Gaelic.⁶ Despite this, there was an understanding in this period that monolingual Gaelic-speaking children once they had mastered literacy in their own tongue then found it much easier to attain literacy in English, although it is important to note that this was not necessarily a pro-Gaelic perspective. At a conference on the subject of education in the Gàidhealtachd held in 1905 under the auspices of An Comunn Gàidhealach, Mr Osgood MacKenzie of Inverewe, Chairman of Gairloch School Board, referred to the schools that his mother, ‘the late dowager Lady MacKenzie of Gairloch’, organised in the district in the 1840s, stating that: ‘the rule in all of them was – no English to be taught till the pupils can first read the Gaelic Bible fluently’.⁷ In similar vein, when the Argyll Commission was set up in 1865 to investigate the state of education in Scotland, the Rev. Dr MacIntosh MacKay referred to the importance of educating through Gaelic in the early stages as it was ‘the mother tongue and easier on the child’, and stated that a Gaelic-speaking child would learn to read Gaelic in a year and English in two years, whereas if educated through English it would take the same child five years to read English only.⁸ Alexander Nicolson, reporting to the same Commission, seemed astonished to learn that young Gaelic-speaking children became proficient in reading Gaelic within a year to eighteen months, whereas learning to read English took at least three years,

⁵ John MacInnes, ‘Religion in Gaelic Society’, in *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes*, ed. by Michael Newton (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 425–42 (439).

⁶ Particular examples of this treatment are fairly common. See for example, William MacKay, *Urquhart and Glenmoriston* (Inverness: Northern Counties Newspapers Printing and Publishing Company, 1893), 403; James Robertson, ‘Memories of Rannoch’, *TGSI*, 51 (1978–80), 199–319 (204). In *Carmina Gadelica*, ed. by Alexander Carmichael, 6 vols (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1900), I, xxii, there is a more unusual reference to girls receiving equally severe punishment.

⁷ *The Northern Chronicle*, 29 March 1905.

⁸ Discussed in John A. Smith, ‘The 1872 Education (Scotland) Act and Gaelic Education’, *TGSI*, 51 (1978–80), 1–67 (15–17), and in John Lorne Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life: Past, Present and Future* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1945; rev.edn. 1950), 61–62.

concluding that Gaelic literacy should therefore be taught first.⁹ These examples show that there was an understanding that the bilingual model worked positively in attaining literacy in both Gaelic and English, although the emphasis was often more on success in the latter, and thus a bilingual system of sorts was in operation before 1872.¹⁰ However, in completely ignoring what had gone before, the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872 was passed with no provision for the specific needs of the Gaelic-speaking child. An Inspector's report in 1896 for a school where the youngest children spoke Gaelic only, stated: 'In the junior classes and especially the Infants Division, the oral teaching should be largely directed to the promotion of a ready and intelligent use of colloquial English'.¹¹ Not only was there no place in the new state education for Gaelic, but in many instances the speaking of the language in schools was actively discouraged and this negative attitude also spread beyond the school door and into the community.¹² In addition, on account of the number of new schools that were built in the Gàidhealtachd to meet the requirements of compulsory state education, there was a demand for more teachers, and as many of those employed frequently had no Gaelic, the influence of the English language and a non-Gaelic culture in the school was significant.¹³

All of these factors – an Education Act that did not recognise Gaelic; the widespread practise of prohibiting the language in the school environment (based on an implicit view that Gaelic was inferior, obsolete and an impediment to progress); and an influx of non Gaelic-speaking teachers (along with wider social and economic factors) – in time had a devastating effect on Gaelic literacy and on the numbers of Gaelic-speakers, and encouraged negative attitudes to the language within the Gaelic community.¹⁴ This unsatisfactory position was initially challenged by the Gaelic Society of Inverness in their call for 'the practical recognition of Gaelic as a branch

⁹ Smith, 'The 1872 Education Act', 27.

¹⁰ For a striking example of the success and failure of the local school before and after 1872 in a Lewis community see the 'Introduction' in Calum Ferguson, *Children of the Black House* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), 3–6 (3).

¹¹ Calum Ferguson, 123.

¹² An example from Kyleakin in Skye where the schoolmaster visited homes and asked parents not to converse with their children in Gaelic is given in Neil J. MacKinnon, 'Strath, Skye, in the Late Nineteenth Century', *TGSI*, 52 (1980–82), 155–197 (162).

¹³ John A. Smith, 'Gaelic teaching in schools' in *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Derick S. Thomson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987 [1983]), 259–263 (260).

¹⁴ See Kenneth M. MacKinnon, 'The School in Gaelic Scotland: Some Historical and Sociological Perspectives and Suggestions', *TGSI*, 47 (1971–72), 374–391 (383).

of early education'.¹⁵ In 1884, the Napier Report of the Crofters Commission had stronger words to say on the matter:

We are of the opinion that the Gaelic language [...] is entitled to something more than permissive recognition, and a place in a footnote along with drill and cookery. It seems to us not less entitled to a place among specific subjects, with special grants allowed for them. [...] We think that the discouragement and neglect of the native language in the education of Gaelic-speaking children [...] ought to cease, and that a knowledge of the language ought to be considered one of the primary qualifications of [...] school inspectors, teachers, or compulsory officers [in Gaelic-speaking districts].¹⁶

These oppositional voices went for the most part unheeded, and the negative view prevailed that being taught through Gaelic held children back in their education generally, and in their acquiring of English in particular, and that it was a hindrance to their success in a rapidly changing modern world. Some of the strongest opponents of the language were the Inspectors of Schools,¹⁷ a fact referred to in a petition to the House of Lords by the 'Federated Celtic Societies' in 1880, in which they asked that the House would:

[C]onsider the obstacles in the way of the teaching of Gaelic, and the benefits that would undoubtedly accrue to the Highlands from the teaching thereof, notwithstanding the adverse attitude taken up by some of H. M. Inspectors regarding it, and which your petitioners are prepared to refute.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, the need to counteract this negativity, as well as addressing the practical needs of the language within the education system became a strong focus of Gaelic activism into the new century, and beyond.

Women and Gaelic Education, post-1872

As has already been noted, the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act opened two important opportunities for women in the public domain of education, either as members of school boards or as teachers. It should perhaps be noted, however, that women had

¹⁵ 'Introduction', *TGSI*, 2 (1872–73), xiii–xv (xv).

¹⁶ Quoted in Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education*, 69–70.

¹⁷ See Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education*, 67–68.

¹⁸ 'The Teaching of Gaelic in Schools', Unidentified Newspaper Cutting, Private Collection.

been involved in education in the Gàidhealtachd before 1872. Female-led Church School Societies were important providers of education in Gaelic-speaking areas, often in some of the most inaccessible parts that even today are described as ‘remote’, but their educational role was gradually relinquished with the advent of School Boards, although the Society remained active in philanthropic work.¹⁹ There are also a number of examples of female members of the Highland gentry establishing schools for their tenants, including spinning or industrial schools to encourage activity that might bring economic benefit. Mention has already been made of Lady MacKenzie’s school at Gairloch, and another was established by the Countess of Dunmore in Harris in 1849.²⁰

A different educational picture gradually emerged in the wake of the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872. In particular the teaching profession became much larger, increasingly female, and more highly qualified.²¹ R. D. Anderson quotes percentages of female certificated teachers in public schools in Scotland as increasing from 41% in 1880 to 74% in 1914. In addition, in 1880, 62% of pupil-teachers were female, and in 1899 and 1914, the percentages of female uncertificated teachers were 93% and 91% respectively.²² This was a trend reflected in other parts of Britain, as well as in other European countries and in the USA and Canada,²³ although there were some striking exceptions.²⁴ Two distinct pay scales were introduced after the 1872 Act, with a female teacher earning just under half of her male equivalent.²⁵ In 1880, for example, a female certificated teacher in Scotland earned an annual salary of £71 compared to the £138 that a male teacher could earn.²⁶ The fact that female teachers

¹⁹ For the educational involvement of The Ladies’ Highland Association, see Mrs J. T. S. Watson, *Pathways in the Isles, 1850–1949* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland Committee on Publications, 1949; repr. 1954, 1955 and 1956).

²⁰ Bill Lawson, *Harris in History and Legend* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2002), 62.

²¹ R. D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People 1750–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 176.

²² Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, 177.

²³ James C. Albisetti, ‘The Feminization of Teaching in the Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Perspective’, *History of Education*, 22 (1993), 253–63 (255).

²⁴ One such contrast has been noted between Sweden and Denmark, for example, where in the former 66% of teachers at the end of the nineteenth century were women while the corresponding figure for the latter was only 28%. Albisetti, 256.

²⁵ Lindy Moore, ‘Education and Learning’ in *Gender in Scottish History since 1700*, ed. by Lynn Abrams, et al., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 111–39 (124).

²⁶ ‘Mean Annual Salaries of Certificated Teachers in English and Scottish Elementary Schools: 1875–1914’ in Helen Corr, ‘Dominies and Domination’, 155. A specific example can be noted from the Minutes of the School Board of the Parish of Balquhiddy in 1909, where it is recorded that ‘Miss Crerar was duly appointed as teacher of Strathyre School at a salary of £65’, while the same Minute

were much cheaper to employ was one reason why they were generally more common in the Highlands and Islands, where the local school boards, who were appointed to manage the schools and were funded by ratepayers, had very limited financial resources. Another reason was that teaching positions in other parts of Scotland, the Lowland towns and cities in particular, held better career prospects and were therefore more attractive to male teachers.²⁷ In addition, the Napier Commission in its report of 1884 suggested that the number of female teachers in the Highlands and Islands should be increased not only for reasons of economy, but also for ‘those civilising influences which women exert’.²⁸ Employing female teachers on the grounds of economy can be clearly illustrated with reference to a vacancy at Spean Bridge Public School in 1905 caused by the departure of the previous male teacher to a new post. It was stated that to appoint another male teacher in his place ‘would be a piece of extravagant expenditure. [...] A female teacher is all that is necessary’.²⁹ The situation was similar in rural Wales, where, as early as 1860 the appointments of ‘mistresses’ to take charge of mixed schools in rural areas was being increasingly advocated where it was stated that ‘a good mistress may be had for the salary paid to an inferior master’.³⁰ Another important advantage in employing a female teacher in rural schools as far as school boards were concerned was that she could teach sewing to the girls, something that was compulsory from the 1860s, whereas with a male teacher, someone else had to be employed for this task, often the schoolmaster’s wife or sister.³¹ In an unusual variation of this situation, the School Board of Strontian Public School appointed a headmaster in 1906 who was

records the resignation of Mr Fraser as teacher of Balquhider School and that his post (a certificated male teacher) was advertised at a salary of £135. (Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2, Balquhider School Board Minute Book 1903–1914, 149–152)

²⁷ Jane McDermid, ‘Gender and Geography: the Schooling of Poor Girls in the Highlands and Islands of Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *History of Education Review*, 32:2 (2003), 30–45 (45). See also Corr, 158, where she discusses the fact that promoted positions were monopolised by men in Scottish elementary schools.

²⁸ *Report of Her Majesty’s Commissioners into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars on the Highland and Islands of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1884), 77.

<<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/crofters/report.pdf>>[Accessed 13 Sept 2012]

²⁹ A letter written under the pseudonym ‘Lochaber’, *OT*, 17 Oct 1905.

³⁰ Minutes of the Committee of Council on Education, 1860–9. Quoted in W. Gareth Evans, ‘Gender Stereotyping and the training of female elementary teachers: the experience of Victorian Wales’ *History of Education*, 21:2 (1992), 189–204 (197).

³¹ McDermid, ‘Gender and Geography’, 40.

not Gaelic-speaking, despite the wishes of local ratepayers, defending their decision on the grounds that his wife was able to teach Gaelic.³²

When school boards took over the management of schools in Scotland after 1872, they wielded considerable power. With regard to the teaching of Gaelic they could in effect control whether the language was taught or not,³³ hence the efforts made by An Comunn prior to each school board election to encourage support for candidates who were ‘on the side of Gaelic’. As early as 1884, ‘the hostility of school boards to the teaching of Gaelic’ was noted by the Napier Commission,³⁴ and as some boards sat uncontested for a number of years it was the case that attitudes of opposition to Gaelic could continue unchallenged for some time. School boards in the economically disadvantaged districts of the Gàidhealtachd struggled financially;³⁵ there were fewer ratepayers to fund the boards and as those on the boards were not, on the whole, representative of the Gaelic-speaking population, they frequently objected to spending their meagre resources on Gaelic. In a typical example of this attitude, an anonymous Lochaber ratepayer asserted that:

The most superficial survey of the district shows that only the poorest and most ignorant still speak Gaelic and in view of this is it not time that our local authorities ceased to foster this language – a language devoid of literature and of no commercial value? I trust that [...] our errant Board [will] return to a system of economy, and so lighten the burdens of an over-taxed community.³⁶

Against this background of general scepticism and often outright disdain towards Gaelic provision in the school system, and minimal recognition of the language from the official Education Department, the three sections that follow will examine the ways in which individual women sought to further the cause of Gaelic within the various educational contexts open to them. The sections discuss women supporting Gaelic on school boards; as part of the education efforts of An Comunn; and as

³² ‘Strontian School Board and Gaelic’, *OWN*, 14 Nov 1906.

³³ From 1878 the Education Department considered Gaelic as a ‘special subject’ along with cooking and ‘drill’, and permitted the use of part of the school income to teach these subjects; a footnote stated that Gaelic ‘may’ be taught within school hours at the discretion of the school board. See John Lorne Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education*, 68.

³⁴ ‘Report of Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland 1884–85’, quoted in Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, 217.

³⁵ Smith, ‘The 1872 Education Act’, 50.

³⁶ Letter to the Editor, *OT*, 17 October 1905.

schoolteachers and informal tutors. As will become clear there was considerable overlap and interaction between these spheres of activity and amongst the women involved.

School Board Women and Gaelic

In Scotland, from 1872, women who were independent occupiers of property worth £4 per annum had a right to serve and to vote for candidates on school boards.³⁷ The number of women who stood for election was small and fewer still were successful. In the first elections (1873) there were 17 women to 5645 men returned; in 1906 the total number of women serving on school boards in Scotland was only seventy-six;³⁸ and when the school boards were dissolved to be taken over by local education authorities in 1918, only five per cent of elected members were women.³⁹ In the Gàidhealtachd, school boards were frequently dominated by landlords, local elites and clergy, the latter category sometimes accounting for two or three members representing different denominations. School boards had considerable influence and power; they could hire and fire teachers, set budgets and had a degree of input in the curriculum outside the compulsory core subjects. From 1906 school boards in Gaelic-speaking areas could access a grant of £10 for each Gaelic-speaking teacher ‘who made use of Gaelic as an aid to instructing Gaelic-speaking pupils in the various subjects taught, including English’.⁴⁰ This was more a practical measure rather than any affirmation for Gaelic on the part of the Education Department, but it put the onus on school boards to decide whether or not to employ Gaelic-speaking teachers and whether the language was given any place in the classroom, as was stressed in an article in *DG*: ‘It is perfectly competent for any School Board to include the teaching of Gaelic in the curriculum *if they are so disposed*’.⁴¹ [original emphasis] The Education Department made good use of this devolved power as a ‘buck-passing’ response to the Gaelic delegations that at various times lobbied for better Gaelic provision, repeating that the school boards had the power ‘if they choose to exercise it, to include Gaelic in the curriculum of any school in which there

³⁷ Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, 166.

³⁸ Jane McDermid, ‘Blurring the Boundaries: school board women in Scotland, 1873–1919’, *Women’s History Review*, 19 (2010), 357–73, 351 & 369.

³⁹ Moore, ‘Education and Learning’, 127.

⁴⁰ ‘Teaching of Gaelic in Highland Schools’, *OT*, 17 Aug 1907.

⁴¹ ‘The Present Provisions for the Teaching of Gaelic’, *DG*, (1911–12), 152.

is reasonable ground for its presence'.⁴² For women who managed to become school board members there was, therefore, an opportunity to promote and influence the use of Gaelic in schools from an official position, although there were clearly limitations.

Archived documentation concerning school boards in the Gàidhealtachd, where it exists at all, is often disappointingly limited in its content, and consequently it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the numbers of women on school boards in the area. Jane McDermid suggests that 'very few women in the tiny parishes of the Highlands' were elected to school boards, giving as 'exceptions', Mrs Morrison on the school board of Lochbroom, and Mrs Ellice on Glengarry School Board.⁴³ Undoubtedly women were a very small minority, but evidence in Highland press reports points to more than one or two female 'exceptions', highlighting the need for more detailed and geographically specific research on the subject. In 1906, for example, the *OT* reported that Mrs Jackson of Swordale⁴⁴ was 'again' elected 'chairman of the Kiltarn School Board' in Ross-shire.⁴⁵ At the school board elections in 1911, the same paper reported that 'a touch of novelty was given to the [Oban] election by the entry into the lists of a lady candidate', although the lady in question was not given sufficient support to be elected.⁴⁶ At the same election, another female candidate – Mrs Macalister, Dunfiunary – was elected 'on her first solicitation of the voters' to Ardchattan and Muckairn School Board. It was also reported that there was no contest necessary for Kilmodan School Board in Glendaruel as the number of candidates nominated was equal to the number of members to be elected, and among those named as re-elected was Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale.⁴⁷ The redoubtable An Comunn activist, Margaret Burnley Campbell, was not only a member of her local school board but also chaired it for some years.⁴⁸ R. D. Anderson, writing on the social standing of school board

⁴² M. Macleod, 'An Comunn Gaidhealach', *Scottish Review* (1914), 365–75, 368.

⁴³ McDermid, 'Blurring the Boundaries', 361.

⁴⁴ Mrs Emily Jackson was the wife of Major Randal Jackson, who bought the Swordale Estate near Evanton in 1885. She was elected to the school board after her husband's death in 1902. Widows taking over a school board position on their landowner husband's death was not unusual. <<http://www.spanglefish.com/evantonoralhistoryproject/index.asp?pageid=206260>> [accessed 8 July 2012]

⁴⁵ 'Highland News Notes', *OT*, 19 May 1906.

⁴⁶ *OT*, 1 April 1911.

⁴⁷ *OT*, 1 April 1911.

⁴⁸ Minute Books of Kilmodan School Board before 1919 have not been located, but information in various newspaper reports suggests that Margaret Burnley Campbell was a school board member from at least 1903, and chair of the Board from 1905.

members in rural areas, states that ‘landowners could still dominate [rural] school boards through their factors and tenants, and any laird who took an interest had little difficulty in becoming chairman’,⁴⁹ and with regard to female school board members generally, he suggests a strong representation of ‘the female relations of local notables, whether landowners or employers’.⁵⁰ However, Margaret Burnley Campbell was a landowner in her own right, and she did not fit the profile, suggested for the majority of school board women, of ‘leisured spinsters and widows’,⁵¹ although another view states that there were considerable numbers of married women as well as widows.⁵²

Women who chaired school boards were uncommon but not exceptional. Flora Stevenson, one of the first women to be elected to a school board in 1873 and who served until her death in 1905, is described by Jane McDermid as ‘unusual’ on two accounts: firstly in being ‘one of only a few women elected to chair a board’, and secondly in her concern that girls’ education was not limited by an emphasis on domestic subjects.⁵³ Margaret Burnley Campbell can similarly be placed in this atypical category: she chaired her local school board and also opposed restrictive curriculum choices for girls. In her platform address at the Juvenile Concert of the Oban Mòd in 1906, for example, she stressed to the young participants the importance not just of singing in Gaelic, but of reading, writing and speaking the language, stating:

You will, no doubt, meet a few people who will tell you that Gaelic has no commercial value, and that the study of it is a waste of time. God help us if education is to be reduced to subjects of direct commercial value only. We shall have nothing left but reading, writing and arithmetic, with sewing thrown in for the girls!⁵⁴

It is clear that in Margaret Burnley Campbell’s case, her social position overrode any potential challenge on account of her gender and gave her considerable influence on the school board and in the two schools – Kilmodan and Stronafian – under its

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, 167.

⁵⁰ Anderson, 171.

⁵¹ Anderson, 171.

⁵² Jane McDermid, ‘School Board Women and Active Citizenship in Scotland, 1873–1919’, *History of Education*, 38:3 (2009), 333–47 (346).

⁵³ McDermid, ‘Blurring the Boundaries’, 364.

⁵⁴ ‘Juvenile Concert’, *OWN*, 3 Oct 1906.

control. The Log Book of the latter school⁵⁵ reveals that a number of her visits to the school were Gaelic-related and that, on a number of occasions, she ‘heard Gaelic reading’ and ‘gave Gaelic lessons’. In addition the schoolchildren were permitted holidays for local and national Mòds:

22 September 1908: Three days holiday given as several of the children are to take part in the Gaelic Mòd Competitions.

7 April 1910: Mrs Burnley Campbell told me to give a half-holiday today as four of the children are to go to Ormidale to practice a Gaelic play for the local Mòd.⁵⁶

School board membership was not quite so harmonious an experience for one of Margaret Burnley Campbell’s female colleagues in An Comunn, Lettice Macnaghten, who was elected to the Balquhiddie School Board⁵⁷ in somewhat antagonistic circumstances in 1909 and remained for just one three-year term. Lettice Macnaghten had a family home at Craigrue on the Invertrossachs Estate near Callander, and another family property, Bitterne Manor near Southampton. In standing as a candidate, she forced an election for a school board that had sat undisturbed for six years, and it was reported that the resentment of the board was such that some of the members declared that ‘they would do less for Gaelic than ever if she persisted in going to the poll’,⁵⁸ an example of the opposition some women had to contend with in exercising their democratic right to be school board members. In the election results, Lettice Macnaghten was third equal, gaining more votes than four of the sitting members.⁵⁹ Her election success was reported in *DG*, stating that: ‘The teaching of Gaelic in schools has got a strong advocate, and with no uncertainty has she made clear to some doubting members of the Board the position which Gaelic should and may occupy in the curriculum’.⁶⁰ Lettice Macnaghten’s efforts to

⁵⁵ Stronafian Public School Log Book, 1864–1920. Argyll and Bute Archives, CA/5/190.

⁵⁶ Stronafian Public School Log Book, 1864–1920.

⁵⁷ This board managed schools in Balquhiddie, Strathyre and Lochearnhead.

⁵⁸ *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 134.

⁵⁹ In the report detailing the result of the voting, Lettice Macnaghten is described as a ‘spinster’, whereas the male candidates are described by occupation (clergyman, retired farmer) or social position (landed proprietor), reflecting the different societal perspectives on men and women, with women defined by their status with respect to marriage. Balquhiddie School Board Minute Book 1903–1914: Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhiddie, 13 May 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

⁶⁰ ‘Timchioll an Teallaich’, *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 176.

further the cause of Gaelic within her school board area were blocked by her fellow members from the start. At a meeting shortly after her election, in connection with a teaching vacancy at Strathyre School, a submission from the ratepayers was considered requesting that the Board appoint a teacher ‘who can instruct the children in reading and writing the Gaelic language’, and included a petition signed by fifty-two inhabitants of the district.⁶¹ It is revealing to examine how this was dealt with at the next meeting of the Board:

The Reverend Mr Macrae⁶² moved the resolution [...]: ‘That the Board meet, at an early date, with the parents and ratepayers in the Districts of Balquhidder, Lochearnhead and Strathyre, to explain to them what is involved in the Teaching of Gaelic in the schools, and to ascertain from them, whether, when in possession of that explanation, they really wish the employment of Gaelic speaking teachers for that purpose’. This motion was not seconded. Miss Macnaghten moved that, in consideration of the Petition from the Strathyre people [...] the Board are bound to engage a teacher competent to teach Gaelic. This motion was not seconded.

The chairman⁶³ moved that the Board do not commit themselves necessarily to the appointment of a Gaelic-speaking teacher, but that, in the case of each vacancy, the question should be treated on its own merits. This motion was supported by Mr McIntyre and became the finding of the Meeting.⁶⁴

The first resolution, while seeming to take a conciliatory stance, implies that once the parents and ratepayers were fully informed, it was likely they would then change their minds. The chairman, however, was clearly not prepared to take this gamble. Against this opposition Lettice Macnaghten’s position to uphold the wishes of the ratepayers and parents for a Gaelic teacher had little chance of support, and the motion that was passed, while offering a platitude that ‘each vacancy should be treated on its own merits’, did not commit the Board to anything positive towards Gaelic. When the applications for the post were considered the appointment was offered to Miss Jessie Crerar on the proviso that ‘her qualifications included the

⁶¹ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhidder, 27 May 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

⁶² Rev. D. M. Macrae, Minister of the United Free Church in Lochearnhead.

⁶³ Rev. David Cameron, Minister of the Established Church in Balquhidder.

⁶⁴ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhidder, 5 June 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

teaching of singing and sewing'.⁶⁵ The members of the Board were therefore willing to use their authority to stipulate certain extra-curricular subjects, but not in favour of Gaelic. A month later in July 1909, when applications were considered by the Board for the vacant position of headteacher at Balquhiddel School, Lettice Macnaghten again took a stance for Gaelic:

Before considering the applications, Miss Macnaghten submitted a petition signed by 73 ratepayers and residents in Balquhiddel requesting the Board to appoint a Gaelic speaking teacher, and to arrange for the reading and writing of Gaelic being included in the ordinary School Curriculum. The Petition was received by the Board and allowed to lie on the table.⁶⁶

Despite this rejection and being unable to attend the next meeting, Lettice Macnaghten wrote to the chairman of the Board to highlight the opportunity they had to appoint a Gaelic-speaking replacement, stating: '[A]s I am confident that the majority of the parents of Balquhiddel scholars wish their children to be taught Gaelic, I hope the Board will see their way to adding Gaelic to the qualifications required by the new teachers'. She also questioned the stipulation that the new teacher should be able to play the harmonium, pointing out that 'the question of teaching Gaelic in the school is quite within the province of the School Board [...] the playing of the harmonium in the church is not'.⁶⁷ In what was a bold move, she copied the letter to the *OT* where it was published in full, provoking a sharp response from the secretary of the School Board, the Rev. D. M. Macrae. He refuted in a very derisory way all the points put forward in support of Gaelic, referring to the fact that the curriculum was already overcrowded, and stating that it was his duty to 'strenuously oppose Miss Macnaghten in what I believe her sincere craze for Gaelic but which she pursues with more zeal than either knowledge or discretion'. Finally he indicated that although her letter was read at the meeting of the School Board in her absence, 'it was appraised at its true value when the Board unanimously agreed

⁶⁵ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhiddel, 25 June 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

⁶⁶ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhiddel, 16 July 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

⁶⁷ 'Balquhiddel and Gaelic Teaching', *OT*, 3 July 1909.

not to discuss it'.⁶⁸ In what became a somewhat robust dialogue in the *OT*, Lettice Macnaghten's brother, Angus Macnaghten, and Major E. D. C. Cameron were her defendants. An anonymous correspondent asked whether Rev. Macrae held any mandate from the '70 ratepayers of Balquhiddel who petitioned the School Board for the appointment of a Gaelic-speaking Teacher', adding that 'Miss Macnaghten deserves the thanks of the community for her public attention to this parish anent the subject'.⁶⁹ Lettice Macnaghten would later comment at a meeting of her local branch of An Comunn that: 'In Balquhiddel, although splendid opportunities had occurred within the last three years, Gaelic was disregarded, [...] in spite of the strongly expressed wishes of a large majority of the ratepayers'.⁷⁰

Lettice Macnaghten did gain some small concessions for Gaelic when, with the support of Mr James Carnegie, the wealthy owner of the Stronvar Estate, a Gaelic Continuation Class was agreed by the Board provided 'a sufficient number of pupils enrolled'.⁷¹ This, however, did not indicate any charitable sentiment towards Gaelic on the part of the Balquhiddel Board since Continuation Classes for Gaelic were eligible for a grant from the Education Department of up to 'three-fourths of the total expenditure',⁷² and as Lettice Macnaghten and James Carnegie were prepared to fund the remainder, the Board would not have been liable for any additional expense. It must have been with a degree of satisfaction that Lettice Macnaghten reported at a subsequent meeting that: '[Thirty four] names had been enrolled, and that further enrolments were expected'.⁷³ In addition, when the Mòd was held in Stirling in 1909, her suggestion that the schools should be given a holiday on one of the days was approved by the Board although there was no great enthusiasm in their comment that 'if any of the children should desire a holiday for the purpose of attending the Mòd, the Board would not raise an objection'.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ 'Balquhiddel and Gaelic Teaching', D. M. Macrae, U. F. Manse, Lochearnhead, Letter to the Editor of the *OT*, 29 July 1909, published in *OT*, 14 Aug 1909.

⁶⁹ 'Balquhiddel School Board and Gaelic', *OT*, 11 Sept 1909.

⁷⁰ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: Balquhiddel Branch', *OT*, 14 Jan 1911.

⁷¹ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhiddel, 3 September 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

⁷² Section 10 of the Education (Scotland) Act, 1908.

⁷³ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhiddel, 20 Sept 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

⁷⁴ Meeting of School Board of Parish of Balquhiddel, 20 Sept 1909. Stirling Council Archives, PC3 2/2.

Lettice Macnaghten was an unlikely champion for Gaelic in such a hostile public domain. While female school board members in urban situations often had at least one other woman on their board and were also able to cultivate female networks of mutual support,⁷⁵ in rural areas where only a handful of members sat on each board, women were on their own. Not only was Lettice Macnaghten a lone woman on her school board, but she was taking issue with the stance of the other members in a way that refused the acquiescence expected of a woman, particularly in opposing male authority figures. It is perhaps not surprising then that she did not seek re-election for another term of office, although with her brother Angus and Sir Malcolm MacGregor standing as 'pro-Gaelic' candidates in the 1911 school board election, there may have been pressure put on her not to stand, thus allowing them to go forward without requiring an election. However, a further reason may be that they were embarrassed or at least concerned at the publicity she attracted in the public press over her Gaelic stance, and while they rushed to her defence in print, this may have been more an act of chivalry than support for her position. This speculation is given some substance by the fact that once Lettice Macnaghten was no longer on the school board, the minutes show that Gaelic ceased to feature as an issue in its discussions.

In contrast to Lettice Macnaghten, Margaret Burnley Campbell's school board career was a long one,⁷⁶ and it would appear conducted in a much more amenable atmosphere. Apart from her personal position as laird (rather than the laird's wife), she was clearly a natural leader and organiser, and comfortable in a public role. There are times when Margaret Burnley Campbell can be seen as the quintessential 'lady of the manor', as when she is reported giving 'her annual gifts of presents, with cakes and fruit' to the pupils attending Kilmodan School.⁷⁷ However, it is clear that she did not see her school board position in this light or indeed limited to 'female' issues, but as a public role in education. A newspaper cutting from

⁷⁵ McDermid, 'School Board Women and Active Citizenship', 337. See also Jane Martin, 'Entering the public arena: the female members of the London School Board, 1870–1904', *History of Education*, 22 (1993), 225–240.

⁷⁶ When school boards were replaced with county and city education authorities following the Education (Scotland) Act 1918, Mrs Burnley Campbell was elected to the new body and she was congratulated by An Comunn for declaring her support for Gaelic teaching in schools. See 'Notes & Comments', *DG*, 14 (1918–19), 120.

⁷⁷ 'Glendaruel', *OT*, 14 Jan 1912.

around 1905 gives some indication of the activity she initiated in support of Gaelic education in Argyll:

Mrs Burnley Campbell is determined that every scholar in Argyllshire shall be given the opportunity of instruction in the mother-tongue, and, in her native Cowal [...] she has succeeded in, partially at least, restoring Gaelic to its true place in the school curriculum. At her insistence too a census of the Gaelic speaking teachers of Argyllshire is now in course of being taken with the object of securing that in the future a knowledge of the language shall be taken into account when vacancies are being filled in Argyllshire schools.⁷⁸

As each school board election approached, An Comunn campaigned to encourage those eligible to vote to give their support to candidates who were on the side of Gaelic. Some of the women in An Comunn were involved in these campaigns, and the next section will discuss the extent of their participation and the ways in which they were also initiating their own agenda within the organisation in support of Gaelic education.

Women, An Comunn Gàidhealach and Gaelic Education

Gaelic education was an important strand of An Comunn's activity; 'To encourage the teaching of Gaelic in Highland Schools' was enshrined in its constitution, but it was only in 1904 with the introduction of standing committees, including one devoted to education, that its efforts in this area became more focused and organised. There were two women – Margaret Burnley Campbell and Ella Carmichael – on the first Education Committee. They were both signatories in July 1904 to a circular sent by the organisation to all the school boards in the Gàidhealtachd in connection with the enquiry by the Scottish Education Department into Higher and Technical Education, and seeking to galvanize the boards to agitate in support of a distinct place for Gaelic in the Education system.⁷⁹ This was the first of a number of initiatives undertaken by An Comunn at important moments for education policy, and while not a great deal of significant progress was made by their initial efforts,⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Unidentified newspaper cutting in Malcolm MacFarlane Archive. NLS Acc. 9736/128.

⁷⁹ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach', *Oban Express*, 27 July 1904.

⁸⁰ An important gain was made in achieving the 'Gaelic Clause' in the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act which was won by a campaign led by An Comunn Gàidhealach. This gained Statutory recognition for Gaelic in the Scottish education system for the first time. However, the wording of the clause was not specific enough to be effective – with the new local authorities being obliged to make 'adequate

the concurrent press coverage and subsequent letters-page debates helped to keep the subject in the view of the general public and of those who were in positions of influence in the political and educational domains.

The extension of the franchise at the school board elections in 1911, prompted a campaign by An Comunn to urge those who were now eligible to vote to use it in favour of school board members ‘a tha bàigheil ris a’ Ghàidhlig agus a bheir gealladh gu ’m faigh i àite cothromach mar chuspair ann an cùrsa-teagaisg nan sgoiltean’.⁸¹ Margaret Burnley Campbell had anticipated this new opportunity in her platform speech to the Stirling Mòd in 1909, stating that she believed that ‘the majority of Highland parents were in favour of having children taught to read and write their native language, and to have them taught by Gaelic speaking teachers’ and she stressed that with the extended franchise, parents would have the power to choose ‘School Board candidates [who were] in favour of Gaelic being taught’.⁸² In similar vein Louisa Farquharson of Invercauld had a long letter published in the *OT* in which she urged ‘Gaelic fathers and mothers and all Highlanders who have votes on this occasion to remember their duty [...] and vote to elect those candidates who are pledged to forward Gaelic teaching’.⁸³

Margaret Burnley Campbell was on the Education Committee of An Comunn from 1904 until 1909, but even when she was not a committee member, she remained involved in the various education initiatives of the organisation. While her interest in education generally is evident from her involvement with her local school board, she held strong personal views on the need for Gaelic to be taught in a bilingual context in schools in Gaelic-speaking areas, as is clear from her platform speeches and addresses where she frequently referred to the subject. In an address to the Lochaber branch of An Comunn in 1909, for example, she stated that ‘Bi-lingual education is accepted nowadays by experts in teaching as one of the most effective means of mental training and as a basis for learning other languages.’⁸⁴

provision’ for teaching Gaelic in schools in Gaelic-speaking areas – and progress did not materialise as was hoped. See Frank Thompson, *History of An Comunn Gaidhealach: The First Hundred* (Inverness: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1991), 44–46; Kenneth MacKinnon, *The Lion’s Tongue* (Inverness: Club Leabhar, 1974), 57.

⁸¹ ‘Obair a tha Romhainn’, *DG*, 6 (1910–11), 37.

⁸² ‘The Eighteenth Annual Mod’, *DG*, 5 (1909–10), 5.

⁸³ ‘Highland School Boards and Gaelic’, *OT*, 15 April 1911.

⁸⁴ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach an Lochaber [*sic*]’, *OT*, 2 Jan 1909.

Two women in succession held the position of Hon. Secretary of An Comunn's Education Committee from 1908–1912. Winifred Parker was elected when a vacancy arose in January 1908, and when she resigned in 1909 on account of her approaching marriage,⁸⁵ she was succeeded by Lettice Macnaghten. As was noted in chapter 2,⁸⁶ Winifred Parker was in joint charge of the Book and Art Stall at the Fèill of 1907, and in that capacity she also edited *The Teaching of Gaelic in the Highland Schools*,⁸⁷ an indication of her interest in Gaelic education. Although her time as the 'energetic and capable' secretary of the Education Committee was short, it coincided with a particularly intense period of activity. An Educational Conference was organised in Oban in the summer of 1908 to galvanise support to secure legislation in the new Education Bill to provide school boards with the necessary funding 'to make adequate provision for instruction in reading and writing the Gaelic language', and also to increase the number of bursaries available to Gaelic-speaking pupils intending to become teachers.⁸⁸ At a meeting of the Executive Council in June 1908, Winifred Parker presented the Report of the Education Committee in which she stated that: 'Mr Lamont, M.P.,⁸⁹ had acceded to the Comunn's request to move the two amendments adopted at the last meeting of the Comunn Executive'. She went on to report that she had sent circulars to '106 School Boards, all branches of An Comunn, 16 Highland branches of the Educational Institute of Scotland, 68 Highland Societies, and 189 Members of Parliament' seeking support for the amendment.⁹⁰ There was, however, considerable opposition to the proposal from a number of school boards in Gaelic-speaking areas, who saw the amendment as endeavouring to make the teaching of Gaelic compulsory. Harris School Board, for example, unanimously rejected the amendments and in a telegram to the Secretary for Scotland pointed out that some of the best schools in Harris were taught under non-Gaelic head teachers 'with native subordinates', stating that: 'This remote Hebridean Board earnestly appeal to you to protect it against the impractical schemes of well-meaning but misguided friends in the South'.⁹¹ The school boards of Tarbert

⁸⁵ 'Announcement of Miss Winifred M. Parker's Marriage', *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 65.

⁸⁶ See chapter 2, 51.

⁸⁷ *The Teaching of Gaelic in Highland Schools* (An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1907).

⁸⁸ *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 36.

⁸⁹ Norman Lamont of Knockdow (1869–1949), Liberal MP for Bute from 1905–1910.

⁹⁰ 'The Education Committee's Report', *DG*, 3 (1907–08), 190–91 (190).

⁹¹ 'Harris School Board and Gaelic', *OWN*, 20 June 1908.

(Loch Fyne) and Dunoon in Argyllshire similarly protested negatively, which suggests that the positive response from Kilmodan School Board was influenced in that position by the pro-Gaelic views of Margaret Burnley Campbell. A number of other school boards also replied positively and there was also considerable support from Members of Parliament, local branches of An Comunn, and sixty-six ministers of the Church of Scotland and the UF Church.⁹² When the Bill was debated in November 1908, Mr Lamont's amendment, seconded by Mr Ainsworth, MP for Argyllshire, was defeated with 109 votes in favour, and 192 against.⁹³

As part of An Comunn's efforts towards achieving official recognition for the teaching of Gaelic in schools, it held Educational Conferences on a fairly regular basis. In the Autumn of 1911, Margaret Burnley Campbell, as Convenor of the Propaganda Committee, reported that the Committee was considering a proposal to hold a conference of bilingual teachers engaged in Highland schools the following Easter 'for the purpose of exchanging views and discovering if possible the best means of introducing and encouraging the teaching of Gaelic in Highland schools'. The Conference was held in Perth in April 1912, and at its conclusion a number of motions were adopted, two of them having been proposed by Lady Helen Stewart Murray and Margaret Burnley Campbell. Lady Helen moved that: 'the grant of £10 in aid of the employment of Gaelic-speaking teachers [...] now distributed under Section 17 (9) of the Education (Scotland) Act, should be paid as an addition to their salary to those teachers in respect of whose services the grant is earned'.⁹⁴ This was an issue that had been contested since the grant was instigated in the General Aid Grant Minute of 19 March 1906. The wording of the Minute was somewhat ambiguous on the point:

Provision is made for a grant of £10 on account of each school attended by Gaelic-speaking children on the staff of which there has been for not less than six months of the school financial year at least one Gaelic-speaking teacher, other than a pupil teacher, who has given instruction in Gaelic and English to the satisfaction of His Majesty's Inspectors.⁹⁵

⁹² *OWN*, 20 June 1908.

⁹³ Education (Scotland) Bill, Debate, 24 Nov 1908.

<<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/nov/24/education-scotland-bill>> [accessed 20 June 2012]

⁹⁴ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: Conference of Gaelic-speaking Teachers at Perth', *OT*, April 18, 1912.

⁹⁵ *The Teaching of Gaelic in Highland Schools* (Glasgow: An Commun Gaidhealach, 1907), 33.

Within a matter of months, however, it was reported that: ‘the School Board of Kilmodan (over which Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale presides) [has] resolved to pay the [£10 grant], when received, to the teacher who does the work’⁹⁶ – a challenge to other school boards to do likewise, perhaps, but also an affirmative statement on the value of the work of the Gaelic teacher. In February 1907 a ‘Highland and Gaelic-speaking teacher’ signing herself as ‘Catriona’ stated in a letter to the press that: ‘[T]he Gaelic grant earned by many teachers is not always given to them, but is used by the school board for general purposes. I mentioned the matter to a School Board Clerk and he informed me that I would not get the grant, but that it would be used by the Board’.⁹⁷ Since the majority of teachers who might have benefitted from the extra money were women already earning considerably less than their male colleagues,⁹⁸ the pocketing of the money by some school boards dismissed the work of female teachers as well as disregarding the potential of the grant to attract Gaelic-speaking teachers to work in the Gàidhealtachd. The quick response from Margaret Burnley Campbell in publicly stating the position of Kilmodan School Board asserted a more progressive view.

Margaret Burnley Campbell brought a motion to the 1912 Educational Conference reiterating the view that when appointing teachers to schools in Gaelic-speaking areas, school boards should ‘in all instances and other things being equal’ give preference to Gaelic-speaking applicants.⁹⁹ In promoting positive discrimination towards Gaelic-speaking teachers she was seeking to encourage a policy of bilingual teaching in the early school years, and in support of this she gave the example of Wales and Ireland where ‘the universal practice was to teach the national language from the very beginning of the child’s school days’.¹⁰⁰ Through An Comunn’s pan-Celtic interaction, Margaret Burnley Campbell was able to gain an insight into the progress made by the Irish and Welsh language movements with respect to education, and as a direct result of a fact-finding mission to Ireland she brought back the idea of a summer school for Gaelic.

⁹⁶ ‘Gaelic in Highland Schools’, *OT*, 21 July 1906.

⁹⁷ ‘The Teaching of Gaelic’, *OT*, 23 Feb 1907.

⁹⁸ See p. 71.

⁹⁹ ‘Gaelic in the Schools’, *DG*, 7 (1911–12), 123–124 (124).

¹⁰⁰ ‘Gaelic in the Schools’, *DG*, 7 (124).

Summer Schools for Gaelic

Margaret Burnley Campbell, Winifred Parker and Lettice Macnaghten, as noted in the previous chapter, were committed to learning Gaelic beyond the stage of simply exchanging pleasantries. In an article published in 1906,¹⁰¹ Margaret Burnley Campbell wrote about the practical difficulties she had encountered as a learner of Gaelic, and she returned to the subject again in January 1909 in order to propose a scheme that she hoped would help ‘discouraged strivers after a colloquial knowledge of Gaelic’.¹⁰² What she had in mind was a residential summer school to be held for a month or six weeks in ‘a very Gaelic-speaking part of the Highlands’, where four or five hours a day would be devoted to learning Gaelic, with a teacher ‘trained in modern methods of teaching languages to beginners’ as well as ‘an accomplished Gaelic scholar’ for the more advanced students. A Summer School had already been established as part of the language movement in Wales, as Gwyneth Vaughan highlighted in the *Celtic Review* in 1905:

The [Welsh Language] Society can also refer with pride and satisfaction to its Summer School, where for a fortnight during the holidays all students may avail themselves of the immeasurable benefit of listening to such lectures as those of Dr Rhŷs and the Welsh professors of our own university.¹⁰³

However, comments in the Irish journal *An Claidheamh Soluis*, subsequently quoted (in Scottish Gaelic) in *DG*, indicate that it was from the Irish summer schools that Margaret Burnley Campbell had taken her inspiration:

Labhradh cheana air a Cholaiste thatar a cur air bonn thall (Sgoil Ghaidhlig Shamhraidh). Bha Mrs Campbell (Ni’ mhic Ailin, no Ni’ mhic Chathmhaoil) a bhos againne an uraidh aig Cloich Cheannfhaolaidh gu faiceadh i an Colaiste¹⁰⁴ agus an obair air siubhal ann. ’S ise bean de na mnathaibh is cruaidhe a tha ag obair an Albainn airson na Gaidhlig.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale, ‘The Difficulties I Encountered in Learning Gaelic’, *DG*, 1 (1906–07), 43–45.

¹⁰² ‘A Summer School of Gaelic in the Highlands’, *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 57.

¹⁰³ Gwyneth Vaughan, ‘The Welsh Language Movement’, *CR*, 1 (1904–05), 380–382 (381).

¹⁰⁴ Coláiste Uladh [The Ulster College] or Ardscoil Cholmcille was established in 1906 at Cloughaneely in the heart of Irish-speaking Donegal. See Róna Nic Chongail, ‘Gaelic Ireland and the Female Dream: Agnes O’Farrelly’s Cultural Nationalism’, in *Women, Social and Cultural Change in Twentieth Century Ireland: Dissenting Voices?*, ed. by Sarah O’Connor and Christopher C. Shepard (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 58. See also Chapter 5 in Róna Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh agus an Fhís Útóipeach Ghaelach* (Dublin: Arlen House, 2010), 197–232.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Timchioll an Teallaich’, *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 176.

Irish language summer schools, held in rural districts where the local population was still strongly Irish-speaking, were formally introduced in 1901.¹⁰⁶ The venture developed into the Irish language teacher-training Colleges that were established in different parts of Ireland to address the ‘scarcity of competent teachers to give instruction in the native speech either in the schools or in the capacity of travelling teachers’.¹⁰⁷ Coláiste Uladh in Donegal had its first season in 1906 with Agnes O’Farrelly as its first Principal, a controversial gender choice at the time.¹⁰⁸ Margaret Burnley Campbell would certainly have known Agnes O’Farrelly from meeting her at the Mòd and the Oireachtas, and with her keen interest in Gaelic education it is not surprising that she took the opportunity to visit Coláiste Uladh. She must have been greatly inspired by what she saw and by Agnes O’Farrelly’s vision, and in planning the Gaelic Summer School she kept closely to the Irish template. In anticipating social activities outwith the daily lessons, such as ‘excursions in boats, on bicycles, and on foot, with picnics’, and in the evenings ‘lectures, debates and cèilidhs’, she was echoing Agnes O’Farrelly’s description of: ‘picnicí ar Chnoc na Bealtaine agus cois abhann i gcomhpáirtíocht leis na múinteoirí eile, chomh maith le céilithe, ceolchoirmeacha faoin aer, turais go Toraigh, tinte cnámh agus cluichí iománaíochta aig am lóin’.¹⁰⁹ The ‘one overarching rule’ at the Summer School was that:

Gaelic, and Gaelic only, be spoken at lessons and at play, in the school-house and in the lodgings. No matter how scanty the vocabulary, no matter how halting the tongue, as a point of honour this rule would have to be observed by all.¹¹⁰

It is probable that a similar rule was in place at Coláiste Uladh, where immersion in the language, both in the classroom and in the community, was a central strand of its philosophy.¹¹¹

The first Summer School of Gaelic was held at Roybridge, in Lochaber, for the month of August, 1909. There had been some discussion with regard to location, but the advantages of this district had been convincingly argued in Gaelic by Juliet

¹⁰⁶ Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh*, 200.

¹⁰⁷ Nic Chongail, ‘Gaelic Ireland and the Female Dream’, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh*, 220.

¹⁰⁹ Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh*, 199.

¹¹⁰ ‘A Summer School of Gaelic in the Highlands’, *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 57.

¹¹¹ Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh*, 212.

MacDonald, the representative of the Lochaber branch on the Executive of An Comunn. After praising the natural beauty of ‘Braigh Loch-abar’, its historical connections, plentiful accommodation, and excellent transport links by rail and steamer, she stated that: ‘Tha a’ Ghaidhlig aig muinntir Bhraigh Loch-abar cho math ’s a tha ri fhaotainn an Albainn agus air an aobhar sin tha e iomchaidh gu’m biodh an sgoil-shamhraidh air a gleidheadh ’s a chearna so’.¹¹² The last point was particularly relevant as it was an important aspect of the summer school model, following the example of Ireland, that there should be interaction with a local Gaelic-speaking community, who in turn might also gain some economic benefit by taking paying guests. The Summer School catered for students at three levels of ability, and there was also instruction in Gaelic singing and, in the evenings, a programme of lectures in Gaelic and English, and a cèilidh held every Friday evening. Thirty-five people were noted as attending the Summer School, with a gender ratio of twenty-two females to thirteen males. There was one visitor from Belfast, Aoidhmin Mac Gréagóir, a little-known member of the Gaelic League with an interest in all forms of Gaelic and its dialectal differences,¹¹³ and only one school-teacher, Miss Rachael Cameron, who came from Kilmonivaig School at nearby Spean Bridge. It is not surprising that the response from teachers was poor as there was no financial assistance on offer at this stage, and sacrificing a month of the summer holidays possibly did not appeal.

The Summer School continued as an annual event,¹¹⁴ but Margaret Burnley Campbell was ambitious that the school should become closer to the Irish example and a means of assisting Gaelic-speaking teachers to become competent in teaching the language. In a speech to the Stirling Mòd in 1909, not long after the first summer school, she expressed the hope that grants would be made available by the education committees for teachers to attend the summer schools ‘as they were already doing for attending cookery and handicraft classes’.¹¹⁵ However, no grants were forthcoming, and in 1913 it was left to the Education Committee of An Comunn to recommend to the Executive Council that the organisation should pay the expenses of ‘a limited

¹¹² ‘Gaelic Summer School at Roybridge: Miss Juliet MacDonald’s Speech’, *OT*, 10 April 1909.

¹¹³ Ciarán Ó Duibhinn, ‘Aoidhmín Mac Gréagóir: A Little-known Scholar’, *Scottish Language*, 14:15 (1995–1996), 31–41.

¹¹⁴ 1909: Roy Bridge; 1910: Oban; 1911: Glasgow (An Clachan); 1912: Bowmore; 1913: Broadford; 1914: Onich.

¹¹⁵ *DG*, 5 (1909–10), 5.

number of teachers' to attend the next summer school, to be held in Broadford, on the Isle of Skye.¹¹⁶ In 1914, when the summer school was held in Onich, near Fort William, it offered a specific course to train teachers to teach Gaelic, described as: 'An ambitious scheme of work [...] to be undertaken in the 100 hours available [...] and the most expert tuition is being secured'.¹¹⁷ It was envisaged that teachers who completed two hundred hours over two years would receive a diploma which An Comunn 'believed' would be recognised by the Scottish Education Department, and which would also serve to indicate that teachers were up to a standard where they could qualify for the grants available from An Comunn, the Highland Trust and the Gaelic Society of London. The preparation of a suitable syllabus and its implementation was taken on by Professor W. J. Watson. It therefore took five years for the summer school to begin to resemble the dual purpose of Margaret Burnley Campbell's vision – to offer a practical benefit for the language by training Gaelic-speaking teachers and to provide a holiday-school for Gaelic learners, with both groups benefiting from social interaction with each other and with a Gaelic-speaking community. However, just as the summer school began to move towards realising this goal, it all came to a halt with the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. It is testament to Margaret Burnley Campbell's optimism and perseverance that the summer school was eventually resurrected in 1928, and continued successfully for a number of years afterwards.¹¹⁸ The many modern examples of the Gaelic summer school model illustrate that Margaret Burnley Campbell was on the right track in recognising the potential of residential courses for encouraging and progressing learners of Gaelic, particularly when held in a Gaelic-speaking district. In addition, she was beginning to recognise that there were different learning needs, not just the particular focus necessary for teachers or potential teachers of Gaelic, but also, for example, native Gaelic speakers who wished to improve their 'literary knowledge of the language'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach: Executive Meeting', *DG*, 8 (1912–13), 130–132 (131).

¹¹⁷ 'Gaelic Summer School', *DG*, 9 (1913–14), 141.

¹¹⁸ In 1934, for example, the summer school was held in Arisaig, and half of the forty-five students attending were teachers.

¹¹⁹ 'Summer School of Gaelic', *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 109–110 (110).

Women Teaching Gaelic

In 1916, An Comunn Gàidhealach drew up a petition to be presented to the Secretary for Scotland (once the war was over) indicating the ‘profound dissatisfaction [of the people of the Highlands] with the present position of Gaelic in the school curriculum’, acknowledging that where Gaelic was taught in a number of schools it was ‘mainly as the result of direct financial aid offered by certain Associations’ and, importantly for the discussion that follows, ‘the enthusiasm of individual teachers’.¹²⁰ This section highlights three women in particular who fit the description ‘enthusiastic individual teachers’, and who progressed the teaching of Gaelic in their individual situations despite the constraints of the official education system. While it is quite possible to see these women as ‘exceptional’, more detailed research is necessary into the profile and Gaelic involvement of individual female teachers across the geographical spread of schools in the Gàidhealtachd in the period in order to confirm this. However, their experience is discussed here to explore the particular challenges women faced as teachers, and to understand where they found opportunities and encouragement to progress their enthusiasm and support for Gaelic within the educational domain.

A general snapshot of the gender balance and Gaelic-speaking status of schoolteachers in a particular area can be gleaned from a report compiled by a representative of An Comunn prior to the school board elections of 1911.¹²¹ The report examined a cluster of sixteen rural schools in the Kinloch Rannoch district of Perthshire, noting that in general ‘the school boards are not enthusiastic [that Gaelic should be taught]’.¹²² The information in the report accords with the general opinion that female teachers predominated in elementary schools, particularly in rural areas, in this period. It also reveals that the majority of this group of female teachers were Gaelic-speaking, although this cannot be claimed as representative of the situation across the Gàidhealtachd in general. The sample suggests that different factors influenced whether Gaelic was taught or not, an unsympathetic school board or head-

¹²⁰ ‘The Comunn’s Petition to the Secretary for Scotland’, *DG*, 12 (1916–17), 26.

¹²¹ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach and School Board Elections’, *DG*, 6 (1910–1911), 118–20 (120).

¹²² This is a point that John A. Smith makes: ‘the Gaelic cause suffered more directly from school boards than it did from the Scottish Education Department’, (Smith, ‘The 1872 Education Act’, 38). Also highlighted in Mary K. MacLeod, ‘The interaction of Scottish Educational Developments and Socio-Economic Factors on Gaelic Education in Gaelic-speaking areas, with particular reference to the period 1872-1918’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1981, 350.

teacher in particular. In some cases, however, there appears to have been a degree of freedom for teachers to exercise individual choice, although the teachers who were striving to include Gaelic in the curriculum were hampered, as the report indicated, by lack of appropriate text books. This corresponds with Jane McDermid's general comment that 'school log books reveal considerable variation [in the curriculum], and indeed informal negotiation between teachers, parents and pupils',¹²³ as will be further confirmed in the discussion that follows.

Since women were predominantly to be found as teachers in the crucial infant and early stages of the education system and frequently as single-teachers in rural schools, they were the potential deliverers of the much talked-about bilingual education. However, the female schoolteacher was at the bottom of a primarily male hierarchy of official management, including the frequently non-Gaelic-speaking inspectorate, the school board, and the headteacher, any or all of whom could deflect an individual teacher's support for Gaelic in the class-room. In taking a closer look at the experiences of three Gaelic-speaking women actively teaching and supporting Gaelic in their different school situations, it is possible to demonstrate the ways in which some teachers created a positive Gaelic educational 'microclimate' and to identify the support provided by individuals and initiatives within An Comunn Gàidhealach and the wider Gaelic movement.

Miss Harriet Stewart (1866–1947)¹²⁴ was the sole teacher at Bunavoulin Public School, in the Drimnin district of Morven, in the most westerly part of Argyllshire. In 1881 the population of the parish was recorded as 828, of which 714 were Gaelic-speakers,¹²⁵ and it is likely that when Harriet Stewart came to teach in Drimnin, in the 1890s, a high proportion of her pupils would have been Gaelic-speaking. In 1902 she described the Bunavoulin School roll as 'a little over thirty – of all sizes from 5 to 14'.¹²⁶ Harriet Stewart corresponded, sporadically, between 1902 and 1916 with Malcolm MacFarlane, initially seeking Gaelic songs suitable for her to use in the school, and he took a particular interest in what she was doing for Gaelic. The lack of graded textbooks for schools was a major difficulty for teachers

¹²³ McDermid, 'Gender and Geography', 42.

¹²⁴ Harriet Stewart was a shepherd's daughter from Perthshire.

¹²⁵ *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, ed. by Francis H. Groome (Edinburgh: Thomas C. Jack, 1882–85). <<http://www.scottish-places.info/parishes/parhistory447.html>> [Accessed 20 August 2012]

¹²⁶ Harriet Stewart to Malcolm MacFarlane, 18 March 1902. NLS Acc. 9736/133.

trying to teach Gaelic in the early school years, and Harriet Stewart was clearly delighted to get her hands on MacFarlane's Gaelic primer, *An Treòraiche*,¹²⁷ as indicated in a letter she wrote in 1904:

I am very grateful to you and I am sure other teachers are for publishing 'An Treòraiche'. It was just the sort of book I was longing for. My standards I and II have it and are very proud of themselves. It is a great honour to get to read Gaelic and I never could lay my hands on a book suitable for little ones before. I hope you do not mean to stop here. Another reader, a little more advanced would be very helpful. The accents have been so very carefully attended to; it gives the children a good grip of quantities from the very start.¹²⁸

It can be deduced from her letter that she was teaching Gaelic across the classes in her school and the precision with which she highlights the benefits of MacFarlane's book reveals her commitment to this work. MacFarlane wrote at least two Gaelic plays suitable for children, with songs included, which he sent to Harriet Stewart and which were performed to the community by the schoolchildren with support from the local branch of An Comunn.¹²⁹ It was reported at the end of 1914 that 'The Gaelic Musical Play [...] "Am Mosgladh Mór" was produced for [the] first time in Bunavoulin School, Morvern under the auspices of the Local Branch [of An Comunn Gàidhealach]'.¹³⁰ There is therefore some evidence that in Harriet Stewart's Gaelic curriculum the sound teaching of Gaelic literacy was balanced with drama and song. This was evidently effective as the Drimnin children were noted at Mòds for their competence and confidence in the language:

In the literary and oral sections [the pupils from Drimnin] acquitted themselves with great credit. This is the part that ought to be emphasised. This is the section that gives assurance that the children are really grasping the language. [...] [T]he impression made by the pupils of Drimnin was very definite indeed. It was refreshing to find young people who were manifestly able not only to recite in Gaelic but to recite in such a way as to make it clear that they understood the literary beauty of the classical passages that they recited.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Malcolm MacFarlane, *An Treòraiche: Leabhran Sgoil air son na Cloinne* (Struibhle: Aonghas Mac Aoidh, 1903).

¹²⁸ Harriet Stewart to Malcolm MacFarlane, 17 Feb 1904. NLS Acc. 9736/38.

¹²⁹ Harriet Stewart to Malcolm MacFarlane, 3 Dec 1914. NLS Acc. 9736/54.

¹³⁰ 'Comunn News', *DG*, 10 (1914–15), 61.

¹³¹ 'Gaelic Teachers', *AG*, 23 (1927–28), 130–131 (131).

As well as an accolade for Harriet Stewart's teaching, the comment above points to the literary and oral competitions at Mòds, both local and national, acting as a yardstick for teachers, and school boards if they were interested, to evaluate the efficiency or otherwise of their Gaelic teaching, and good results would possibly also appease any potential school board criticism.

Harriet Stewart had achieved the Ladies Literate in Arts (LLA) qualification, which was the closest a woman could get to an MA before 1892 and, as it was assessed at degree standard, it was a degree in all but name,¹³² an indication not just of her ability but that she was ambitious to make the most of her personal situation. She must also have been keen to improve her Gaelic teaching as she attended the 1913 and 1914 summer schools in Broadford and Onich.¹³³ On her retirement in 1930, *An Gaidheal* paid tribute to her as 'a conscientious and successful teacher' and particularly so in her teaching of Gaelic:

Ever child in Morven is pleased to be *Morairneach* and to speak and write his or her native tongue. [...] Miss Stewart has achieved something far greater than the production of prize-winners. She has imbued a whole generation with her love of the language and all that it connotes to the Gael who cherishes his heritage.¹³⁴

In considering the Gaelic activism of Harriet Stewart, evidence suggests that she was setting her own Gaelic curriculum and successfully implementing it without attracting disapproval from educational officialdom. There is also evidence that the local branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach provided encouragement and support, an important factor in her single-teacher situation, as well as offering a wider forum for Gaelic interaction through the Mòd and the summer schools. It is probable that her connection with Malcolm MacFarlane came by way of an introduction at a Mòd, and his interest and assistance were clearly a further source of encouragement.

Miss Annie Johnston (1886–1963), a native of Barra, is now best remembered and revered as a singer and tradition-bearer, a view which has perhaps overshadowed her work in Gaelic education. She trained as a teacher at Notre Dame

¹³² L.L.A. (Lady Literate in Arts) was a distance-learning course set up by the University of St Andrews, with an annual examination held at a convenient centre.

<<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/specialcollections/didyouknow/lla/>> [Accessed: 24 July 2012]
See Rosalind K. Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1983), 261.

¹³³ 'Gaelic Teachers', *AG*, 23 (1927–28), 130–131 (130).

¹³⁴ 'Miss Harriet Stewart, L.L.A.', *AG*, 26 (1930–31), 146.

Training College, in Glasgow, and taught in Castlebay School from 1910.¹³⁵ In contrast to Harriet Stewart, Annie Johnston was initially forced to do her Gaelic teaching outwith the official curriculum where, despite an overwhelmingly Gaelic-speaking population, the language was not encouraged in the school environment and the other members of staff in the school were not Gaelic speakers.¹³⁶ In that situation she undertook to address the neglect of Gaelic in the school timetable through instructing the children in Gaelic outside the classroom, encouraging them to participate at small local mòds which she also organised. When circumstances eventually changed with regard to Gaelic being taught in the school, possibly as a result of the 1918 Amendment, Annie Johnston then taught senior classes and presented pupils for the Intermediate Certificate.¹³⁷ However, what is of particular interest here is the influence on her teaching career of an initiative recommended by Margaret Burnley Campbell in 1908, although it was some twenty years later before it was actually implemented. Her suggestion was that An Comunn should sponsor a young teacher to be taught the new ‘Direct Method’ of language teaching, and she offered to pay a month’s tuition in the Irish College, Dublin, to a suitable person.¹³⁸ The ‘Direct Method’,¹³⁹ which emphasised listening and repeating in order to develop spoken communication was in use in teaching Irish in the early years of the twentieth century, and Agnes O’Farrelly was a great champion of its merits.¹⁴⁰ Had there been any support in 1908 for Margaret Burnley Campbell’s offer, the young Annie Johnston, newly graduated, would have been an ideal candidate. A second opportunity came her way, however, when the idea surfaced again twenty years later in 1928, when she was funded by An Comunn to go to Ireland for a month to learn the ‘Direct Method’ of language teaching, as she described in a personal letter:

Fhuair mi litir an dè o’ bhan-tighearna Ormadail (Mrs Burnley Campbell) [...] Thuairt i gu’n robh an Comunn Gaidhealach deonach air

¹³⁵ Annie Johnston’s first teaching post from 1908–10 was in Brevig School, Barra.

¹³⁶ ‘Gaelic Teachers’, *AG*, 23 (1927–28), 162–163 (163). For a sense of the strong focus on English in the school system and the predominance of non-Gaelic teachers in schools in South Uist and Barra in this period see F. G. Rea, *A School in South Uist: Reminiscences of a Hebridean Schoolmaster, 1890–1913* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1997).

¹³⁷ ‘Gaelic Teachers’, *AG*, 23 (1927–28), 162–163.

¹³⁸ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach: Executive Meeting in Oban’, *DG*, 4 (1908–09), 65–66 (66).

¹³⁹ A method of language teaching based on the Berlitz Method developed by Maximilian D. Berlitz (1852–1921). See Gerhard J. Stieglitz, ‘The Berlitz Method’, *The Modern Language Journal*, 39 (1955), 300–310.

¹⁴⁰ See Nic Congáil, *Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh*, 209–10.

mise dhol do Eirinn airson mios a' dh-ionnsachadh a' Mhodh Dhìrich air teagasg Gàidhlig – (the direct method). Agus tha an Comunn deonach mo chosdais a phaidheadh, agus “substitute” a chur 'nam àite anns an sgoil fad na h-ùine sin, ma bhios mi deonach – cha bu ruith ach leum leamsa an cothrom a' ghabhail, agus ma gheibh mi cead o'n Director of Education bidh mi falbh 'san Earrach gu Baile Àth-Cliabh. Nach buidhe dhomh! Ach – it's too good to be true, agus ma's urrainn do'n mhaighstir-sgoile againn mo chumail air ais, 's mi tha cìnnteach gun dean e sin.¹⁴¹

Three points can be drawn from the letter above: that Margaret Burnley Campbell was clearly still involved in the initiative; that Annie Johnston was more than eager to accept this opportunity; and that she fully expected it to be blocked by the school headmaster. As it turned out, she was given permission to go to Ireland, and the influence of Margaret Burnley Campbell and the pan-Celtic connections she established in her early An Comunn involvement were further confirmed in another of Annie Johnston's letters:

Tha a Bhean-ualas a tha cuideachadh Dr Douglas Hyde ann an Oil-thigh Àtha Cliath ag gealltainn dhomh gun toir i mi do na sgoiltean agus do'n Oil-thigh a dh-fhaicinn na Gàidhlig air a teagasg, agus ni mise sonas leis a sin.¹⁴²

The 'bean-ualas' referred to here would almost certainly have been Agnes O'Farrelly and it is highly likely that Margaret Burnley Campbell was the 'go-between' in the arrangements.

Although Gaelic was introduced as a subject for the intermediate Leaving Certificate in 1904, it took some years before secondary departments were in a position to present pupils for the exam. When Lady Elspeth Campbell opened the 1906 Mòd in Oban, she announced with some pride that the Oban School Board was 'about to provide facilities for the studying of Gaelic in Oban High School.'¹⁴³ The Oban School Board had a number of Gaelic-supporting members, including Dr Kenneth Campbell, who was prominent in the local branch of An Comunn and on its Executive, and therefore there was support for establishing Gaelic in the secondary school curriculum. What was more remarkable was that they appointed a woman as

¹⁴¹ Letter from Annie Johnston, Barra to T. Douglas MacDonald (Fionn MacColla), 30 Nov 1928. NLS Dep. 239/2/D.

¹⁴² Annie Johnston, Barra to T. Douglas MacDonald, 21 Feb 1929. NLS Dep. 239/2/D.

¹⁴³ OT, 3 Oct 1906

the first Gaelic teacher in this pioneering position. Mary MacRae (1871–1944), a native of Skye, presented her first pupils for the Lower Gaelic leaving certificate in 1910.¹⁴⁴ She was followed in the same school in 1914 by another woman, Mary D. McQueen (1866–1947), who belonged to Ellenabeich on the Island of Seil, to the south of Oban, and who is credited for preparing a scheme of study for the Higher Leaving Certificate after it was introduced in 1915. The challenge she faced in this work was described in an article in *An Gaidheal*:

There was little or nothing to go by; the paper required five or six years of study, and the syllabus had to be comparable in standard and scope with those long established in other languages. Miss McQueen's original scheme has been greatly extended in various directions so that now a pupil who works faithfully through it acquires a sound knowledge of modern Gaelic, some acquaintance with Old Gaelic and Irish, and much information regarding Celtic customs, culture and history.¹⁴⁵

At the time of her retirement in 1931, Mary MacQueen was the only Gaelic teacher to have presented pupils at Higher Gaelic level.¹⁴⁶ Her pupils also achieved regular success in the literary competitions at the Mòd, further underlining a less-recognised function of the event, as already suggested in connection with Harriet Stewart, in providing an evaluation for a Gaelic teacher on the effectiveness of her work. While little can be gleaned about Mary MacQueen's personal ideas and motivations from the information available which focuses on her professional career, her contribution to the book of quotations produced for the An Comunn Féill – ‘Cha teid uabhar nam ban fo'n talamh’¹⁴⁷ – gives some indication that encouraging both women and Gaelic were important to her. Despite the limited place given to Gaelic within the school system, the women discussed above were able, through their knowledge and ability in the language, to expand and even to progress their teaching careers, while at the same time contributing positively to the position of Gaelic in their individual teaching situations.

Interest in learning Gaelic outwith the formal school environment was stimulated by the various activities of An Comunn and other Gaelic groups and

¹⁴⁴ ‘Teachers of Gaelic’, *AG*, 23 (1927–28), 34–35 (34).

¹⁴⁵ ‘Teachers of Gaelic’, *AG*, 23 (1927–28), 34–35 (35).

¹⁴⁶ ‘The Late Miss Mary McQueen’, *OT*, 6 Dec 1947.

¹⁴⁷ ‘The pride of women will not be laid in the ground’, *Sop As Gach Seid: A Straw from every Sheaf*, (Glasgow: Archibald Sinclair, 1907), 49.

societies, as well as wider Celtic Revival enthusiasm, creating alternative teaching opportunities which Gaelic-speaking women in particular were able to take advantage of. Such teaching varied from individuals seeking private tuition to informal classes in both urban and rural communities. This area of teaching provided a welcome source of income for the Gaelic writer Katherine Whyte Grant. Although she was unable to complete a teacher-training course as a young woman due to ill health,¹⁴⁸ she obviously retained an interest in teaching, and taught Gaelic in a variety of situations throughout her life. During her time in Australia¹⁴⁹ she took classes in Sydney but as this did not provide her with enough income, and despite her homesickness, – ‘How gladly I would go home!’,¹⁵⁰ – she accepted an invitation to teach Gaelic in ‘a colony of Gaels on the Clarence River’,¹⁵¹ although with some concerns regarding the severity of the climate.¹⁵² It was, however, her commitment to the greater good of the Gaelic language and culture that was her overriding motivation as confirmed in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane: ‘I hope to serve the cause of the Gaelic people and language by remaining here for another year’.¹⁵³ Returning home in 1907, it was to the Gaelic movement that she looked to find employment:

Mr Macintyre [...] hopes to get me the supervision of the Gaelic of the proposed choir of the new Highland Ceilidh which meets on the South Side, not far from here. He has also spoken of me to Mrs Burnley-Campbell.¹⁵⁴

As a woman and with no immediate family commitments, Katherine Whyte Grant was free to move to wherever there was an opportunity for work, and as a result of the recommendation noted above, she went to Ormidale for two months ‘to speak Gaelic’ with Margaret Burnley Campbell and her daughter. She was also required ‘to read [Gaelic] with them and to get the young lady to play Gaelic songs with the

¹⁴⁸ See chapter 5, 155.

¹⁴⁹ See chapter 5, 156.

¹⁵⁰ Katherine W. Grant, Sydney, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 19 May 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/130.

¹⁵¹ Katherine W. Grant, Sydney, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 15 Aug 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/43.

¹⁵² Grant to MacFarlane, 15 Aug 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/43.

¹⁵³ Grant to MacFarlane, 15 Aug 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/43.

¹⁵⁴ K. W. Grant, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 12 Nov 1907. NLS Acc. 9736/43.

proper accent, or rhythm. Also to hear her read German'.¹⁵⁵ The following year Katherine Whyte Grant was taking classes in Perth under the auspices of the Perth Gaelic Society,¹⁵⁶ and she was also giving private tuition as indicated in a letter: 'At this time I cannot today write at any great length, as my time will be taken up with some private pupils, and a class at night'.¹⁵⁷

Women and the 'Mother-tongue'

The extent to which women were allocated space to participate in the official education system was generally predicated on the desirability for women's feminine and moral influence in the instruction of young people. This in turn drew on an essentialist view of women as mothers and matriarchs in the domestic sphere of the home and community, a role that included a responsibility for teaching moral and cultural values, and nurturing the 'mother-tongue'. It was a perspective that left women open to criticism or blame if they were seen to have neglected this role, in a way that was not always equally applied to men.¹⁵⁸ In a play written by Katherine Whyte Grant, a school-teacher reprimands a pupil who does not have the correct pronunciation in her Gaelic reading with: 'Stad! Stad! Chan e Beurla th'agad idir – 's furasd' aithneachadh nach eil do mhàthair ag cumail na Gàidhlig riut-sa'.¹⁵⁹ This is both a reproach as well as a reminder to mothers about their 'duty' with regard to teaching the Gaelic language to their children.

Ella Carmichael might at first appear to mirror the ideology of the Irish-Ireland movement¹⁶⁰ in her article, 'Some Things Women Can Do',¹⁶¹ but she in fact articulates a broader perspective, suggesting that women should take the lead in encouraging the Gaelic-speaking population as a whole to assure the future of the Gaelic language. Although acknowledging the influential role of a mother in the language development of her children in their early years, she saw this as a joint

¹⁵⁵ Katherine Whyte Grant to Malcolm MacFarlane, 17 Feb 1908. NLS Acc. 9736/14. Katherine Whyte Grant had a good knowledge of German. See chapter 5, 150.

¹⁵⁶ *DG*, 5 (1909–10), 29.

¹⁵⁷ Katherine Whyte Grant, Perth, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 28 Dec 1909. NLS Acc 9736/136.

¹⁵⁸ The subject is discussed across different linguistic communities in a number of the papers in in *Bilingual Women*, ed. by Pauline Burton, Ketaki Kushari Dyson, and Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994); for a Gaelic context in particular in the same publication see Evi Constantinidou, 'The 'Death' of East Sutherland Gaelic: Death by Women?', 111–127.

¹⁵⁹ Catriona Nic Ghille-Bhain Ghrannnd, *An Sgoil Bheag agus a' Mhaighdean-mhara* (Glascho: Alasdair MacLabhrainn, 1927 [1910]), 4.

¹⁶⁰ See chapter 1, 12–13.

¹⁶¹ E. C. Carmichael, 'Some Things Women Can Do', *DG*, 1 (1906–07), 8–10.

parental responsibility, stating that ‘Highland mothers, as well as fathers, should see that their children grow up bi-lingual’.¹⁶² On the other hand, if the father rather than the mother is the Gaelic-speaker then it is his duty to teach the language to the children, although in this she suggests that the non-Gaelic mother ‘can do much in encouraging the father and the children in the use of the language’. Much of what Ella Carmichael was articulating is very familiar to the advice given today to parents bringing up children bilingually; she points out, for example, that once a child was at school where English dominates, the home language should be predominantly Gaelic to compensate. Overall, Ella Carmichael’s article offers an inclusive view of women, not limited to mothers or to a single class – ‘every woman has some sphere [of influence]’ – all of whom ‘can do something for Gaelic’.¹⁶³ However, while she includes women who were not Gaelic-speakers – ‘[i]f she does not know the language [the people around her] will be glad to teach her’ – she was particularly stressing the importance of *Gaelic-speaking* women to the future of the Gaelic cause: ‘It is no exaggeration to say that, if *our* women would put their hearts into the Gaelic movement, the future of the language would be assured, and there could be no talk of Gaelic being doomed’.¹⁶⁴ [Emphasis added]

Ella Carmichael’s early childhood years in Uist, and her holidays there as a young woman, gave her an understanding of the social circumstances and daily lives of the ‘ordinary’ Gaelic people in the Gàidhealtachd, and it was from this perspective that she viewed the needs of Gaelic education. In presenting a paper, ‘The Position of the Mother Tongue’, at an Educational Conference held by An Comunn in 1923 she stated:

Our Gaelic-speaking children passed through the elementary schools and while they were at school they made quite a good show in English. But those of them that stayed at home soon forgot the parrot English of the lesson books. [...] Unless they had learned to read and write their own language they were shut out from reading. What was the object of this ‘parrot’ education? Was it, as she was informed recently, ‘that they may become civilized (!), and then come south as servants’? [...] There were, of course, different ideas of what constituted civilization. [...]

¹⁶² Carmichael, ‘Some Things Women Can Do’, 9.

¹⁶³ E. C. Carmichael, ‘Some Things Women Can Do’, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Carmichael, ‘Some Things Women Can Do’, 8.

What was required was [a curriculum] which began with the mother tongue and worked towards bilingualism.¹⁶⁵

At the same conference, Margaret Burnley Campbell and Agnes O'Farrelly were also present. While all three women contributed to the debate, they were the only female representatives from what was described as 'the first gathering of the kind where Directors of Education, members of Authorities, teachers, educationalists and other educated Highlanders met to discuss exhaustively the present position and future prospects of Gaelic in Highland schools'.¹⁶⁶ The fact that the teachers represented were all male was partly due to the gender bias of the educational hierarchy but also reflected a shift in the focus of the Gaelic movement, from 1904, away from its efforts to establish bilingual teaching in the primary school stages to concentrate on Gaelic as a special subject in the secondary department. The negative consequences for Gaelic of this emphasis on the academic study of the language in the later stages of a pupil's education rather than on encouraging teaching through Gaelic in the early years have been highlighted by a number of educational commentators,¹⁶⁷ but a possible gender aspect to that change has not been explored.¹⁶⁸ The shift of perspective ignored the numbers and the potential of the Gaelic-speaking portion of the female teachers who predominated in the infant and early stages of education, and who, particularly with the removal of school boards as a result of the 1918 Education Act, could have been a positive force for the language at a critical stage for its future. In addition the same Act included the 'Gaelic clause',¹⁶⁹ which might have encouraged education through Gaelic at the primary school level had there been more support for that sector. If, as has been claimed, there was unease in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century that 'the influence and prestige of the dominie in Scottish education was being eroded',¹⁷⁰ due to the feminisation of the teaching profession, with the result that the contribution of women teachers was often marginalised, this may also have been reflected in the Gaelic educational context.

¹⁶⁵ 'The Inverness Conference', *AG*, 19 (1923–24), 10–14 (14).

¹⁶⁶ 'The Inverness Conference', *AG*, 19 (1923–24), 10.

¹⁶⁷ Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education*, 74; John A. Smith, 'The 1872 Education (Scotland) Act', 61.

¹⁶⁸ For an opinion on the change of focus, see Smith, 'The 1872 Education (Scotland) Act', 57.

¹⁶⁹ See this chapter, 82, note 80.

¹⁷⁰ Corr, *Dominies and Domination*, 156.

Chapter Conclusions

As an overall assessment of Gaelic in the school system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is quite possible today to recognise what Professor W. J. Watson in his inaugural address as Chair of Celtic at Edinburgh University in 1914 described as a ‘most unsatisfactory’ position.¹⁷¹ However, from the perspective of the individual women discussed in this chapter a more nuanced view might have been expressed. For these women, whether as school board members, teachers, or women active in An Comunn Gàidhealach, engaging with Gaelic in the educational sphere created an alternative space in which they were able to extend their participation and influence. Women were accustomed to working within tight parameters, and the opportunities for Gaelic in the classroom, however constrained, allowed some Gaelic-speaking women teachers to make small gains for the language and in their personal development as teachers. It was also the case that An Comunn Gàidhealach through its local branches and the Mòd, as well as in the educational vision of some women active on its committees, provided support and encouragement for a number of the female teachers discussed in this chapter.

Achieving school board membership was not easy for the women who stood for election and, once elected, they often found their participation boxed into specifically female educational sectors. Women promoting Gaelic in the school board forum were therefore challenging a number of oppositions. The resistance to Lettice Macnaghten’s pro-Gaelic stance reveals that the members of her board were at best ‘lukewarm’ towards encouraging Gaelic in the schools under their control, and similarly positioned with respect to an assertive woman on the school board. Margaret Burnley Campbell’s experience was different on account of her social position and strong personality, but her proactive Gaelic agenda highlights that much more might have been achieved for Gaelic if other school boards had been similarly inclined.

The positions some women were able to access in An Comunn enabled them to participate in the official arena of Gaelic educational protest and this in turn allowed them to infiltrate the fringes of the male world of politics. However, to focus exclusively on this central arena of Gaelic educational activism – the propaganda

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Campbell, *Gaelic in Scottish Education*, 72.

exercises, political lobbying and public rhetoric – overlooks a neglected subtext of individual activity in support of Gaelic education in local situations. The individual activism of the women discussed in this chapter can be seen as a positive contribution to Gaelic education at this time, while not changing the overall negative picture.

4

Interaction and Influence:
Women's Participation in Gaelic and Pan-Celtic Societies

[A] woman can always, by her own interest in the cause of Gaelic, by her own enthusiasm for it and love for it, influence those about her; and she can make Gaelic and things pertaining to it respected and liked.¹

The enthusiasm with which The Ladies entertained and carried out the duties devolving upon them in connection with the Féill deserves the [Mull and Iona] Association's warmest acknowledgement. Personally, I feel that our undertakings will not meet with that success we are all so anxious to see realised till the ladies have not only a right of membership, but also a right to deliberate and vote on our proceedings.²

Although An Comunn Gàidhealach, as discussed in chapter two, became the central organisation of the Gaelic movement in the early twentieth century, there were numerous other groups and societies that had an interest in Gaelic and Gaelic culture, many of which had a much longer history. These can be roughly divided into clan, kindred, and scholarly or scholarly/cultural societies, and they were mostly based in the Lowland cities and towns, with the exception of the Gaelic Society of Inverness. Glasgow had the largest concentration of such groups, reflecting the size of the Highland diaspora resident in that city and in the towns of its hinterland such as Airdrie, Greenock and Paisley.³ An idea of the numerical extent and variety of these groups in the first decade of the twentieth century for Glasgow alone can be grasped from the 'Glasgow Highland Society Directory' published in the *Oban Weekly News*,

¹ E. C. Carmichael, 'Some Things Women Can Do', *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 8–10, (9).

² 'Mull and Iona Association, AGM', *OWN*, 20 June 1908.

³ See Charles W. J. Withers, *Urban Highlanders* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), particularly chapter 6.

where in January 1908 there were fifty-six such organisations listed.⁴ Similar societies and groups, in lesser numbers, were active in Edinburgh, as well as other urban settlements such as Perth and Dundee. It is not the intention in this chapter to examine these groups in any detail, which would be a study in itself, but rather to provide a general overview of the position of women in the clan and kindred societies, and then focusing on those societies that had a scholarly dimension, to examine female interaction and influence in the Gaelic Society of Inverness and the Celtic Union. A final section will consider the wider cultural sphere of formal and informal pan-Celtic interaction.

Overview of Clan and ‘Kindred’ Societies

In discussing the role of the plethora of urban Highland societies that formed in the nineteenth century, the Rev T. M. Murchison highlighted the specific clan or geographical loyalties that underpinned such groups:

It was from the second half of the nineteenth century that most of the still surviving Highland societies date. Most of these, of course are sectional, that is, they cater for the people of a particular region or district or clan, and almost all have their primary object the promotion of social intercourse.⁵

In general, the clan societies tended to be male-dominated and their annual public dinners were commonly male-only, while women were allowed to attend the other big social event of the year – the ‘Annual Gathering’. If women were permitted as members of these groups, they were frequently given a subordinate ‘feminine’ role in the philanthropic work of the society. The Clan MacKinnon Society, for example, had a ‘Ladies’ Guild’, described in one report as ‘an adjunct of our Society’, and which was responsible for dispensing money and clothing to the ‘poor and deserving in the Highlands and Islands’.⁶ Similarly, the Clan MacRae Society had a ‘Ladies’ Work Guild’ which distributed garments to ‘needful cases’.⁷ The clan groups were more likely to describe themselves as ‘Highland’ rather than ‘Gaelic’ and certainly by 1900, reports of various clan societies reveal that there was very little if any place

⁴ ‘Glasgow Highland Society Directory’, *OWN*, 4 January 1908.

⁵ Rev T. M. Murchison, ‘Story of An Comunn: The Forerunners’, *AG*, 50 (1955), 14–18 (14).

⁶ ‘Clan MacKinnon Society’, *OT*, 25 May 1907.

⁷ ‘Clan MacRae Society: Annual General Meeting’ *OT*, 4 May 1912.

for Gaelic in their deliberations and ‘Scotch’ songs predominated at their concerts. At the eleventh annual concert of the Clan Maclean Association, out of a programme of twenty-five items only three were in Gaelic, although Professor Magnus MacLean who was in the chair was a Gaelic speaker.⁸

The general impression of the kindred or territorial societies is that they were more socially inclusive than the clan societies and, to a degree, than the scholarly societies. This reflects the broad social remit of these groups whose membership reflected geographic origins and loyalty to a particular area of the Gàidhealtachd, and functioned as a means of maintaining these local connections in the city as well as reinforcing cultural identity and providing social interaction. In addition the kindred societies provided general support to ‘new arrivals’ from the home area to the city, and at times sent philanthropic support in the opposite direction. These objectives were quite precisely elucidated in the example of the Glasgow Skye Association, which stated in 1865 that its objects were: ‘The promotion of social intercourse, the preservation of local recollections, and providing temporary relief to such deserving persons as might require pecuniary aid’.⁹ Possibly as a result of having a less exclusive membership, the kindred societies relied on the patronage of gentry or notables who had connections to the area represented by the society, and who were therefore invited to be on the platform at the ‘Annual Gathering’, the main social event of the year in each society’s programme. In 1914, for example, the Annual Gathering of the Mull and Iona Association held in the City Hall, Glasgow, welcomed ‘the well-known and much esteemed Mull lady, Mrs Cheape, the “Squire” of Carsaig, Mull, and of Bentley Manor, Worcestershire, who occupied the chair’.¹⁰ With reference to this particular example, the Association boasted of being ‘the first Glasgow Highland Association to have a lady to preside at the Annual Gathering’.¹¹ This claim was countered in a letter in the *OT*, where it was stated that the Lewis and Harris Association ‘a few winters ago’ was presided over by Mrs Burnley Campbell,

⁸ *OT*, 21 Feb 1903.

⁹ Professor Magnus MacLean, ‘Glasgow Skye Association: Sketch of its History’, *Souvenir Book of the Jubilee Gathering* (Glasgow: Glasgow Skye Association, 1921), 11–25 (11).

¹⁰ ‘Mull and Iona Association: 45th Annual Gathering’, *OT*, 31 January 1914. Maude Mary Cheape took over the Tiroran and Carsaig estates on Mull after her husband’s finances collapsed. Col. George Clerk Cheape bought the estates in 1893. She was referred to as ‘the Squire’ when she inherited the Bentley Estate in Worcestershire from her father, where she owned several packs of hounds and was known for her sporting ability in the Hunt. <<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/forums/passengers-crew/1238-catherine-beatrice-cheape-cay.htm>> [Accessed 25 Jan 2013]

¹¹ ‘Mull and Iona Association: 45th Annual Gathering’, *OT*, 31 Jan 1914.

‘who addressed the meeting in both Gaelic and English’,¹² a counter-claim that can indeed be corroborated by the report of the 1908 Annual Gathering of that Association.¹³ In general women were not to be found as office-bearers at any level in the kindred societies, and although the ‘Glasgow Highland Society Directory’ of 1908, referred to above, gives the name and address of the secretary of each group, no women appear in the list. This was in marked contrast to An Comunn Gàidhealach, which had Margaret Burnley Campbell as president at this time. A list of the various office-bearers of the Glasgow Skye Association between 1873 and 1921 confirms an exclusively male leadership.¹⁴ Even as late as 1921–22, a directory of Glasgow Highland societies¹⁵ reveals that it was still very rare for a woman to be an office-bearer, possibly reflecting the fact that many of the groups listed would have been set up in the early or mid-nineteenth century¹⁶ at a time when views on women in public were even more prescriptive than later in the century and their constitutions still reflected that opinion. Conversely, however, women were frequently named as representatives of various societies on An Comunn Gàidhealach’s Executive Council, confirming that organisation as well ahead of other Gaelic groups in giving women the opportunity to be involved in official roles, although, as was discussed in chapter 2, this may initially have been more by default than design. The fact that individual women were able to gain a foothold in An Comunn, then encouraged wider female participation in the organisation generally. In contrast, it is fairly clear that both clan and kindred societies took a more conservative view with regard to female participation, reflecting what would have been considered at the time as conventional feminine spheres of activity.

The Intellectual Woman

Before moving on to consider the Gaelic groups that had a more scholarly focus, there is a need to briefly consider the particular challenges and oppositions that the

¹² ‘Mull and Iona Gathering’, letter from ‘Fraoch Geal’ to the Editor, *OT*, 14 Feb 1914.

¹³ ‘Lewis and Harris Association’, *OT*, 21 Nov 1908.

¹⁴ ‘Glasgow Skye Association: Office-Bearers, 1873–1921’, *Souvenir Book of the Jubilee Gathering* (Glasgow: Glasgow Skye Association, 1921), 11–25 (11).

¹⁵ *Directory of Highland & Clan Associations* (Glasgow), 1921–22. NLS. HP4.89.319.

¹⁶ The Glasgow Skye Association, the Tiree Association and the Mull and Iona Association, for example, were all founded in the 1860s. See Donald E. Meek, ‘Radical Romantics: Glasgow Gaels and the Highland Land Agitation, 1870–1890’ in *Glasgow: Baile Mòr nan Gàidheal* ed. by Sheila Kidd (Glaschu: Roinn na Ceiltis, 2007), 161–185 (171).

‘woman of intellect’ faced in this period. The concept of the intellectual woman was just one aspect in the broad debate about definitions of femininity and women’s place in public life that played out across a spectrum of text and discourse throughout the late nineteenth century and particularly during the high point of suffrage activism in the first decade of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that the gates of academia were slowly if grudgingly opening to women, there was still powerful propaganda in circulation that portrayed the intellectual woman as turning her back on her ‘natural’ role as wife and mother. It was given additional credence in the light of Darwinian ideas, which suggested that women were biologically unsuited to intellectual activity and if they insisted in going in that direction, they would become ‘unwomanly’ and possibly lose the ability to fulfil their main function as mothers or were likely to produce weak and sickly children.¹⁷ In addition intellectual women were portrayed as unattractive¹⁸ and therefore a woman who was both beautiful and intelligent was particularly difficult to define. Intellectual confidence was seen as a trait of the stereotypical ‘new woman’ and many of those women who positively embraced this designation were the pioneering female academics. When Miss Goodrich Freer, who will be discussed later, addressed the Gaelic Society of Glasgow in 1896, a newspaper report noted: ‘She is indeed an extremely charming personality without the faintest look of the ‘new woman’ about her’,¹⁹ underlining a general perception that a woman displaying intellectual confidence could not also be conventionally feminine.²⁰ The Victorian view that ‘intelligent girls don’t marry’ was tenacious: ‘The thoughtful girl, when she takes to learning, develops into the blue stocking, and blue stockings are seldom wed’, warned one Scottish periodical in 1901.²¹ There was therefore plenty to dissuade or at least to challenge women who embraced the scholarly arena.

¹⁷ See Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 188–190; Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 26–27; Rosalind K. Marshall, *Virgins and Viragos* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1983), 262.

¹⁸ See Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 220.

¹⁹ *Glasgow Evening News* (21 Oct 1896), quoted in John L. Campbell and Trevor H. Hall, *Strange Things* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006 [1968]), 226.

²⁰ See Sally Ledger, *The New Woman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 17–18.

²¹ ‘Girls who don’t marry’, *People’s Friend* (1901), quoted in A. K. Kelman, ‘Female ‘Self Culture’ in Edinburgh: The Ladies Edinburgh Debating Society’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Queen Margaret University, 2002, 130.

Ella Carmichael

As a woman surrounded by eminent ‘men of letters’,²² it is perhaps not surprising that attention has only comparatively recently been given to Ella Carmichael as a Gaelic and Celtic scholar in her own right, and as one of the early female university graduates in the 1890s, she had the academic credentials to validate her status as an ‘intellectual woman’.²³ Her interest in the language and cultural heritage of the Gael was a family inheritance, steeped as she was in Gaelic and Gaelic tradition from her childhood upbringing in Uist, and inspired by her parents’ interests in the lore and antiquities of the Gàidhealtachd. Later as a young woman in Edinburgh, she was part of their circle of friends in the Gaelic community of the city, and she also had intimate links with influential figures in artistic Celtic Revival circles in the capital. In addition, through her visits to Ireland and her pan-Celtic activity she became acquainted with some of the leading figures in the Gaelic League and in Irish Celtic Revival circles. Ella Carmichael was therefore an important mediator between a number of differently focused networks both inside and outside the Gaelic movement. Although she moved to Inverness in 1906 on her marriage to W. J. Watson, she returned to Edinburgh in 1909 when her husband took up the position of rector at the Royal High School in the city, and Edinburgh was her home for the rest of her life. The duality of her Gaelic and Celtic perspectives alongside her feminist leanings and her scholarly and artistic activities within Gaelic, Celtic and pan-Celtic cultural contexts will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Scholarly Societies

Compared to the clan and kindred groups, the Gaelic scholarly or antiquarian societies were somewhat different in their focus, although they too enjoyed their annual dinners and gatherings. The oldest and possibly the most influential of these, still regularly publishing its Transactions, is the Gaelic Society of Inverness (1871), which will be discussed in more detail. Other broadly similar societies included the Gaelic Society of Perth (1880), the Dundee Highland Society (1814–1868, reformed

²² Daughter of Alexander Carmichael, wife of Professor William J. Watson, and mother of Professor James Carmichael Watson.

²³ See this chapter, 119, note 77.

in 1880),²⁴ Greenock Highland Society (before 1873), Glasgow Gaelic Society (1887), the Gaelic Society of Stirling (1903) and the Gaelic Society of Edinburgh (1908). Some of these were more scholarly than others, and there were also other groups that included scholarly elements in a broader cultural spectrum. For example, Cèilidh nan Gàidheal (1896) had a multi-purpose agenda, including language classes, lectures and social activity and was unusual in its determination to have Gaelic as the language of participation in all its activities. Although the Gaelic scholarly societies were open to women it was harder for women to participate in this arena given the limited academic opportunities open to them before the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, for women who believed in challenging areas where it was assumed, because they were women, they had no interest or contribution to make, scholarly societies were important groups to join.

In general, the large national scholarly societies at this time were reluctant to admit women or simply did not think that there was any need to consider the matter. For prestigious groups such as the Royal Society of London and the Society of Antiquaries of London it was only with the passing of the Sex (Disqualification) Removal Act of 1919 that their position on admitting women changed.²⁵ In contrast, the Society of Antiquaries of Ireland took great pride in promoting its liberal view ‘as regards the larger and better portion of the human race’, pointing out in its journal in 1903 that while the Scottish Society of Antiquaries allowed women ‘gratuitously’ to a separate class styled ‘Lady Associates’ as opposed to ‘Fellows’, and the English equivalent allowed no lady Fellow or Associates, the Irish Society ‘[had] no [such] law or limitation’.²⁶ Provincial antiquarian and natural history societies, however, appear to have been more relaxed in allowing women to become members, although it may have been the case that they catered for a more conservative public and that they were perhaps less likely to have women wanting to participate. In any case, the procedures of nomination and election were possibly often as good as a barrier for any woman aspiring to membership.

²⁴ When reformed, it was known as the ‘Dundee Association of True Highlanders’, changing to ‘Dundee Highland Society’ in 1898. See *The Celtic Annual: Year Book of Dundee Highland Society 1912*, ed. by Malcolm C. MacLeod, (Dundee: Dundee Highland Society, 1911), 2.

²⁵ In the case of The Royal Society despite a change of policy in response to the 1919 Act, no women were proposed until 1943, subsequently elected in 1945. See Georgina Ferry, ‘The exception and the rule: women and the Royal Society 1945–2010’, in *Notes and Records of The Royal Society*, <http://rsnr.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/64/Suppl_1/S163.full> [accessed 2 Sept 2012]

²⁶ *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 33 (1903), 23.

The Gaelic Society of Inverness was one of the foremost of the Gaelic scholarly societies, and the only one based in the Gàidhealtachd. T. M. Murchison considered the formation of this society in 1871 as a significant marker of the ‘turning point’ for the Gael and Gaelic, an important early sign of hope after the difficulties and ‘destitution’ of the preceding decades.²⁷ This view echoes that of the chairman of the Annual Assembly of the Society in 1909, Cameron of Lochiel, who claimed that ‘the year 1871 marked the commencement of the Gaelic revival’.²⁸ Given this noted significance, the next section will consider the membership and participation of women in the Gaelic Society of Inverness, the opportunities it offered as a platform for their support for Gaelic and the ways in which attitudes to women within the Society were challenged.

The Gaelic Society of Inverness

When the proposal for a new Gaelic body that eventually became An Comunn Gàidhealach was first publicly discussed, the Gaelic Society of Inverness, then entering upon its third decade, was not overly enthusiastic in support of what they may have deemed a rival to their pre-eminent position as a Gaelic scholarly society. However, at their Annual Assembly in 1891 the Gaelic Society was gracious enough to wish the new Association ‘all success’ and remarked that ‘they hoped that it may be able to show as good a record at the end of twenty years as the Gaelic Society of Inverness had done’.²⁹ The two organisations were in fact quite different in focus, although they had common aims and loyalties, and the fact that they are both still active to the present day perhaps underlines the different roles that they have fulfilled. The Gaelic Society of Inverness, as its name indicates, was based in Inverness, but as it grew in prestige, it drew interested members from across Scotland and beyond. Its main objectives were to encourage Gaelic antiquarian and scholarly studies, although at times it also took on an important campaigning role for Gaelic, particularly in connection with the successful establishing of the Celtic Chair at the University of Edinburgh in 1882, and also on various occasions in support of Gaelic education. Despite a designation as a Gaelic society, its language of discourse was predominantly English, although some papers were read in Gaelic, and a Gaelic

²⁷ Rev T. M. Murchison, ‘Story of An Comunn: The Forerunners’, *AG*, 50 (1955), 14–18.

²⁸ ‘Annual Assembly’, *TGSI*, 27 (1908–1911), 162–170 (162).

²⁹ ‘Annual Assembly’, *TGSI*, 18 (1891–92), 1–8 (2.)

address was given at its Annual Assembly. The membership reflected this bilingual inclusiveness, attracting Gaelic-speaking activists, scholars and clergy, as well as members of the Highland landowning and gentry classes, and local businessmen and civic dignitaries within and around Inverness, some of whom spoke Gaelic and many who did not.³⁰ This eclectic representation, reflecting different shades of political opinion, class and views on Gaelic and the Gàidhealtachd, meant that, like An Comunn Gàidhealach later, the Society's affirmed non-political stance was at times somewhat strained.³¹

The Gaelic Society of Inverness was open to women from its formation in 1871 on the same terms as men although this equality did not extend to the annual dinner, which remained strictly male-only until 1923 (of which more later).³² By the time the first volume of the Society's *Transactions* was published there were four lady members, comprising one Honorary Member and three Ordinary Members, out of a membership total of 182.³³ The number of female members grew very slowly in the early decades of the Society; there were eight in 1880/81, rising to thirteen by 1908/11, this latter figure representing about five per cent of the total membership. The first woman to take out life-membership³⁴ was Miss Amy Frances Yule of Tarradale House, Muir of Ord, in 1893. Amy F. Yule was a linguist and scholar who travelled widely with her father, the geographer Sir Henry Yule, and built up a large library of books on natural science and military and Scottish history.³⁵ She was a supporter of the Gaelic activities of the Inverness branch of An Comunn Gàidhealach in particular but also gave financial support to the main organisation. In a tribute to Miss Yule following her death in 1916, she is described in the *Transactions* of the Society as 'a patron of literature, a warm supporter of Gaelic, and a wise friend of education'.³⁶ She was without a doubt a generous patron of Highland and Gaelic

³⁰ For a discussion of the Society in its early years within the wider Gaelic context of the time see William Gillies, 'A century of Gaelic scholarship', in *Gaelic and Scotland, Alba agus a' Ghàidhlig*, ed. by William Gillies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 3–21.

³¹ 'Non-Political Character of the Society', *Celtic Magazine*, 5 (1882–83), 181.

³² See this chapter, 117.

³³ 'Members of Society', *TGSI*, 1 (1871–72), 121–125.

³⁴ She was the only woman out of thirty-two life members at this time.

³⁵ University of Aberdeen Archival Database: Source information for MS 1162: Yule family and Napier of Magdala papers.

<[http://calms.abdn.ac.uk/Dserve/dserve.exe?dsqServer=Calms&dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqCmd=Show.tcl&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqSearch=\(PersonCode=='NA16007'\)](http://calms.abdn.ac.uk/Dserve/dserve.exe?dsqServer=Calms&dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqCmd=Show.tcl&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqSearch=(PersonCode=='NA16007'))> [Accessed 24 Oct 2010]

³⁶ W. J. W., 'Introduction' in *TGSI*, 28 (1912–14), v–xiii (vii).

literature, her name frequently appearing in the Subscriber Lists for many books on Highland and Gaelic subjects published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁷ She subscribed to no fewer than twenty-three copies of Edward Dwelly's iconic Gaelic dictionary,³⁸ possibly with the intention of donating copies to libraries and schools in the Highlands. In addition, she offered to 'bear the cost' of getting a reliable transcript made of the Book of the Dean of Lismore. Her particular interest in this item was fired by the fact that it was her great, great grand-uncle, John MacKenzie of Tarradale, who sent the original manuscript to the Advocates Library in Edinburgh.³⁹ By the turn of the century, there were two other women in the elite 'Life Member' category – Mrs Mary Seton Watts⁴⁰ and the Countess of Cromartie. The Countess was a member of the Highland aristocracy with links to Anglo-Irish literary circles and who also gave support to An Comunn Gàidhealach.⁴¹ The third of the trio of women, Mary Seton Watts (1849–1938), was of the Fraser-Tytler family who owned the Aldourie estate on Loch Ness side. She became the second wife of the Victorian symbolist artist George Frederick Watts, but was also a talented artist in her own right, and a disciple of Ruskin and the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement.⁴² It was her interest in the revival of Celtic art, however, that links her artwork to her Highland roots, and the intricate patterns from the *Book of Kells* and the decoration on early West Highland stone crosses were incorporated in her designs for relief panels, pots and carpets.⁴³ In a letter written in 1901, Mary Seton Watts describes the revivalist inspiration she found in Celtic art:

³⁷ See, for example, the List of Subscribers for *The MacDonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry*, ed. by Rev A. MacDonald and Rev. A. MacDonald, (Inverness: Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company, 1911); and D. Campbell, *Reminiscences and Reflections of an Octogenarian Highlander* (Inverness: Northern Counties Newspaper and Printing and Publishing Company, 1910).

³⁸ *The Illustrated Gaelic Dictionary*, ed. by Edward Dwelly, (Herne Bay: E. MacDonald, 1902–11).

³⁹ W. J. W., 'Introduction' in *TGSI*, 28 (1912–14), v–xiii (vii).

⁴⁰ Mrs Watts had been an Honorary Member since 1896 – the hierarchy of membership, in ascending order, was: Apprentices, Ordinary Members, Honorary Members and Life Members.

⁴¹ See chapter 2, 32; chapter 5, 169.

⁴² Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 72.

⁴³ It is worth noting that in Celtic Revival artistic networks, Mary Seton Watts was a contemporary of Archibald Knox and both designed for Liberty & Co. in London. (See Veronica Franklin Gould, *Archibald Knox & Mary Seton Watts: Modern Celtic Art Garden Pottery* (Farnham: Arrow Press, 2001)) Although Archibald Knox was born and brought up in the Isle of Man and was a supporter of the Manx Language Society, he was of Scottish parentage and he had a direct connection to the Gaelic movement through his mother Ann Carmichael, a sister of Alexander Carmichael. <<http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/mannin/v5p309.htm>> [Accessed 20 June 2011]

I love it with all my heart [...] we in the present day should not be mere *copyists* of their elaborate knottings [...] but breathe its spirit [...] use it in a language in which our modern thoughts can be conveyed, *invent* upon it [...] there is no decoration so suited to *telling* its story. It is, I believe, like the [G]aelic language, the most emotional of the styles of decoration. But [...] requires reserve and temperance and judgement, in the soul of the designer, to prevent it from becoming meaningless'.⁴⁴

Despite reiterating the pervasive 'emotional Celt' discourse, it is notable that she makes a connection with the Gaelic language that she would have heard from house-staff and workers in her childhood home. The personal involvement of all three women in antiquarian, literary and artistic fields, together with the fact that they each had historic family connections in the Inverness area, would be reason enough for them to give their support to the Gaelic Society of Inverness as life-members, despite the fact that none of them spoke Gaelic. They would, however, have recognised that it was important for women to be conspicuous as members of such a scholarly society, at a time when many similar bodies were still reluctant to include women at all.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, while most of the societies with a Gaelic interest were open to both sexes, women were unlikely to be found as office-bearers. The Gaelic Society of Inverness was no different in this respect. It did, however, confer the honour of Bard to the Society as early as 1876 on the Lochaber poet Mary MacKellar (1836–1890),⁴⁵ a position she held until her untimely death. This was a surprising choice in some ways; in 1876 there was considerable opposition to women having any public role and there were no other women prominently involved in the Society at the time; it was also comparatively early in Mary MacKellar's literary career, with the bulk of her work published from 1880 onwards. On the other hand, as will be discussed further in chapter 7, from a Gaelic perspective the female voice was traditionally given a respected place in poetry and song, although limited to certain subject genres, and there were well-known examples of female poets, such as Màiri nighean Alasdair Ruaidh, (c.1615–c.1707) or Sìleas na Ceapaich (c.1660–c.1729), to name but two who had a recognised public voice. A probable influence in the choice of Mary MacKellar as bard was Professor

⁴⁴ Mary Seton Watt to James Morton, 15 March 1901, quoted in Veronica Franklin Gould, *Archibald Knox & Mary Seton Watts: Modern Celtic Art Garden Pottery* (Farnham: Arrow Press, 2001), 18–19.

⁴⁵ See chapter 5, 146–154.

Blackie, who was the chief of the Society at this time, and who was notable in his encouragement of women fulfilling their potential, as can be seen in his support of Mary MacPherson and in the early career of Jessie N. MacLachlan.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Mary MacKellar was well-equipped for the position of Bard in which she was expected from time to time to compose songs that reflected the general sentiments and bonhomie of the society. She had absorbed in her youth the metres, techniques and imagery of traditional praise poetry and could adapt and redeploy these with some skill. In addition, in composing poems to mark notable public events in the Gaelic world such as the marriage of Queen Victoria's daughter to the Marquis of Lorne in 1872,⁴⁷ and an important meeting that took place in Edinburgh in 1873 in support of establishing a Chair of Celtic at the university,⁴⁸ she had already positioned herself in the traditional role of a Gaelic bard.

Mary MacKellar's first 'official' composition for the Gaelic Society of Inverness which she recited at the Annual Assembly of 1876,⁴⁹ reflected a number of the themes of the speeches made by the various gentlemen who addressed the gathering, particularly the imagery of the gallant and fearless Highland regiments and their contribution to the expansion of the Empire. In this poem she also praised Highland men of faith who went as missionaries to distant lands, mentioning David Livingston from Mull and the lesser-known Dr Alexander Duff from Moulin in Perthshire, a Gaelic-speaking minister who spent many years in India. She also reiterated the descriptions of empty Highland glens and black hearths common in Gaelic poetry of the period, and similarly there was no comment directed towards the landowning class. Above all, however, the song celebrated the brethren of the society with the exuberant Professor Blackie at their head:

'S Ceann-feadhna gaoil a Chomuinn aigh
A sheinn sinn, a chlarsach nan teud,
An t-ard-fheallsanach, Blackie nam buadh
Ceannard uasal measg nan ceud!

⁴⁶ See chapter 7, 221.

⁴⁷ See chapter 5, 150.

⁴⁸ Mary MacKellar, 'A' Chathair Ghàidhlig', in *Modern Gaelic Bards* (2nd Ser., Pt. 1), ed. by Malcolm MacLeod (Dundee: John Leng, 1913), 77–79.

⁴⁹ Mary MacKellar, 'Comhradh eadar Am Bard 's a Chlarsach', *TGSI*, 6 (1876–77), 13–16.

[...]

Mile failte do'n Cheann-fheadhna!
 'S do Chomunn greadhnach tir an fhraoich,
 Tir thuathach nam fearaibh laidir
 A bhios, mar bha iad riamh, na'n laoich!⁵⁰

In October 1881, Mary MacKellar composed a Gaelic elegy on the death of the Reverend Alexander MacGregor who had been active in the Society since it began, in which she was also careful to incorporate reference to another recently deceased member – Mr Davidson of Tulloch.⁵¹ At the Annual Assembly in July 1884, she honoured the chairman of the Society, Sir Kenneth MacKenzie, in 'Òran do 'n Ridire Coinneach Mac-Coinnich, Triath Ghearrloch', in which her knowledge of the format and traditional elements of panegyric in Gaelic poetry is very evident:

So deoch slàint' a' Ghàidheil ghasda,
 Do 'm bu dualach a bhi gaisgeil,
 Ard cheann-feadhna de Shiol Eachuinn
 Leis 'm bu chleachda a bhi mòr.

Mile fàilte air an uasal
 Do 'm math a thig feile cuaiche
 Sporan a bhios tric ga fhuasgladh
 Leis an laimh nach cruaidh mu 'n òr.

[...]

Saoghal fada 'm beatha shuaimhnich,
 Guidhidh mi do 'n armunn uasal,
 'S gu 'm bu fada a beo ri 'ghualainn
 Baintighearna a' chuailein òir!⁵²

⁵⁰ Mary MacKellar, 'Comhradh eadar Am Bard 's a Chlarsach', *TGSI*, 6 (1876–77), 13–16 (16).

⁵¹ 'Death of the Rev. Alexander MacGregor', *TGSI*, 10 (1881–83), 75–78. Màiri Mhòr also composed an elegy for MacGregor; see 'Marbhrann Do'n Urramach Alasdair Mac-Griogair', Mairi Nic-a'-Phearsoin, *Dain Agus Orain* (Inbhir Nis: A. & U. Mac-Coinnich, 1891), 156–157; See also notes on the poem in Dòmhnall Eachann Meek, ed., *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1998), 141.

⁵² 'Òran do 'n Ridire Coinneach Mac-Coinnich, Triath Ghearrloch', *TGSI*, 11 (1884–85), 96–97.

Apart from her official poetic compositions, Mary MacKellar also wrote a total of six papers that were read to the Society, the first in 1885 and the last – ‘Legends and Traditions of Lochaber’⁵³ – in April 1890, the year of her death. The Minute for the meeting of the Society for March 1887 noted that: ‘John Whyte read a paper by Mrs Mary MacKellar, entitled ‘The Waulking Day’⁵⁴ which gave rise to a very interesting discussion. A cordial vote of thanks was accorded to Mrs MacKellar for her excellent paper’.⁵⁵ The subject-matter of this paper was a particularly female one, as was the ‘Traditions and Songs of the Shieling’ on which topic Mrs MacKellar also contributed two papers.⁵⁶ Bringing these domestic and distinctly female themes to a scholarly arena was in itself breaking new ground. In a tribute after her death in September 1890, Mary MacKellar was described as ‘a brilliant conversationalist in both languages, [...] a woman of warm heart, high spirit, and fine intellect’,⁵⁷ and it is to the credit of the Society that it offered a means for her papers to be published at a time when the scholarly genre was overwhelmingly masculine.

While Mary MacKellar might be seen from today’s perspective as pioneering a place for female scholarship in a Gaelic context, there was not any sense of this at the time and her achievements did not encourage other women to come forward. In fact it was midway into the 1920s before another female-authored paper was read to the Society and published in its *Transactions*,⁵⁸ with the exceptions of Katherine Whyte Grant’s Gaelic translation of Friedrich Schiller’s ‘Wilhelm Tell’ published in 1891,⁵⁹ and a paper by the now-discredited Ada Goodrich Freer in 1896.⁶⁰ It seems therefore that support for Mary MacKellar was probably of a personal nature and that her papers were seen as an extension of her accepted position as bard, rather

⁵³ *TGSI* 16 (1889–90), 267–276.

⁵⁴ ‘The Waulking Day’, *TGSI* 13 (1886–87), 201–217.

⁵⁵ Minutes of Gaelic Society of Inverness, 9 March 1887.

⁵⁶ ‘The Shieling: its traditions and songs’: Part 1, *TGSI*, 14 (1887–88), 135–153; and Part 2, *TGSI*, 15 (1888–89), 151–171.

⁵⁷ ‘Introduction’, *TGSI*, 16 (1889–90), xi–xiv (xii).

⁵⁸ Augusta Lamont, ‘Place-names of the Knockdow Estate’, *TGSI*, 33 (1925–27), 203–224.

⁵⁹ See chapter 5, 162.

⁶⁰ See chapter 6, 194. Miss A. Goodrich Freer, ‘Second Sight in the Highlands’, *TGSI*, 21 (1896–97), 106–115. Miss Freer lectured to a number of learned societies on aspects of ‘Highland Folklore’ between 1896 and 1901, including the Gaelic Society of Glasgow in November 1901. See John L. Campbell and Trevor H. Hall, *Strange Things* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006 [1968]), 227.

than a reflection of any particular move to encourage women in general to present papers to the Society.⁶¹

Although Ella Carmichael had experience of prestigious lecture podiums in Ireland – in 1902 she read one of her father's papers to the Irish National Literary Society, and gave a paper of her own on 'Ancient Celtic Seats of Learning' to the Irish Celtic Association⁶² – she did not venture onto the scholarly platform of the Inverness Gaelic Society.⁶³ However, when the Society took the bold decision in 1909 to invite a woman to give the Gaelic address at their Annual Assembly,⁶⁴ the first speaker to be suggested was Ella Carmichael, who was then living in Inverness. As was discussed in chapter 2, women were by this time prominent in An Comunn Gàidhealach, and the Gaelic movement was acquainted with women such as Margaret Burnley Campbell addressing Gaelic gatherings and this perhaps encouraged the Inverness gentlemen to venture into new territory. The minutes of the Society indicate that when first asked, Ella Carmichael wanted time to think about the proposition, in itself suggesting a degree of ambivalence. When she did accept she used the occasion to make some very pointed remarks that were clearly aimed at the 'gentlemen only' status of the Society's annual dinner. She referred in her address to the fact that 'this was the first time in the history of this honourable Society that a lady has been asked to make the Gaelic speech at the annual assembly'⁶⁵ and then went on to emphasise that, historically, Gaels had always recognised the worth of women, that it 'was only when they took to following foreign ways' that this had changed and she therefore saw her invitation to speak at the Annual Assembly as a sign of 'improvement'. Ella Carmichael had more than

⁶¹ This is not to suggest that the Inverness Gaelic Society was exceptional in this respect. The Fabian Society, for example, published one hundred and eighty seven papers between 1884 and 1918, of which only five were contributed by women. See 'Fabian Society Online Archive', <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/library/archive/online_resources/fabianarchive/home.aspx > [Accessed 9 Jan 2013]

⁶² Alexander Carmichael, Edinburgh, to Father Allan McDonald, 5 May 1902. Canna House Letters.

⁶³ She is only very occasionally to be found giving a paper to a Gaelic group – in March 1906, for example, she lectured on the 'Evil Eye' to the Glasgow High School Ceilidh.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, 20 May 1909.

⁶⁵ 'Annual Assembly', *TGSI*, 27 (1908–1911), 162–170 (166). Ella Carmichael's Gaelic address was published in English in the *Transactions*, which is somewhat surprising as the Gaelic addresses at the Annual Dinners were always reported in Gaelic. It may have been that she herself was reluctant, for the reasons already noted, to commit it to print in Gaelic, or perhaps that she wanted to make the content of the address available to non-Gaelic speakers.

this to say on the historical precedent for gender equality, citing the example of the great Gaelic assembly of Tara:

To the great assembly of Tara, which was held every three years, no man was admitted without his wife, and no woman without her husband. [...] Here women were on an equality with men. Not only so, but when the great feast of Tara came on, an important part of the assembly – as its annual dinner is of the Gaelic Society of Inverness – the women were not quietly ignored or allowed simply to drop into tea shops, or their equivalent of those days – they also were due at the feast. We can still read accounts of the dresses worn at these feasts so many hundreds of years ago – the dress of the men as well as the women.⁶⁶ No doubt the Gaelic Society of Inverness will take a lesson in hospitality from the national Assembly of Tara.⁶⁷

In claiming a matriarchal pan-Gaelic heritage to legitimize her view that women should be allowed to attend the Annual Dinner, Ella Carmichael was echoing similar arguments used by the suffrage movement that frequently incorporated appeals to ancient and often imagined national histories when women were treated with more parity.⁶⁸ Her address was reported as ‘eloquent and gracefully delivered’ and that it ‘won the hearts of her audience’, but although it was printed verbatim in English in the Inverness press and later in the *Transactions* of the Society, there was no comment on its content.⁶⁹ The fact that her challenge to the Society to admit women to the Annual Dinner had been quietly ignored was further underlined when only two months later the Gaelic Society held a dinner in honour of her husband, William J. Watson, on the occasion of his leaving Inverness to take up a new position as rector of the Royal High School in Edinburgh, to which his wife was not invited. In concluding his speech at the dinner, W. J. Watson remarked candidly that: ‘Mention had been made of my wife. My wife was not exactly pleased at not being present there that night, but at the same time my wife was very greatly gratified at the

⁶⁶ In referring to ‘accounts of the dresses’, Ella Carmichael was making a wry comment regarding the reporting style of the time, where reporting the presence of women at any public event was often limited to detailed descriptions of the dresses they were wearing.

⁶⁷ ‘Annual Assembly’, *TGSI*, 27 (1908–1911), 162–170 (166).

⁶⁸ See Sandra Stanley Holton, ‘British freewomen: national identity, constitutionalism and languages of race in early suffragist histories’ in *Radical Femininity: Women’s self-representation in the public sphere*, ed. by Eileen Janes Yeo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 149–171.

⁶⁹ ‘Gaelic Society of Inverness: Concert Assembly’, *Inverness Courier*, 13 July 1909; *Northern Chronicle*, 14 July 1909.

honour done to her husband and in her name he had to thank them most heartily'.⁷⁰ In the report of the Annual Dinner of the Inverness Gaelic Society in 1910,⁷¹ among those listed as sending apologies for their absence were the Countess of Cromartie, Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale and Miss Yule of Tarradale. Since they were not eligible to attend the dinner in the first place, their action was clearly reiterating and supporting the point made by Ella Carmichael. It was not until the Annual General Meeting of the Society in January 1923 that the rules were changed and 'after discussion [...] it was agreed to invite Ladies to attend [the Annual Dinner]'.⁷² The report of the 1924 annual dinner published in the *Transactions* records that there were fifty members present, including four ladies 'who graced the function for the first time in the history of the Society'.⁷³ Ella Carmichael attended her first dinner in 1927 and on that occasion she referred to the fact that 'when she lived in Inverness the Gaelic Society was so backward that they did not admit ladies to the dinner', adding that 'on one occasion she, along with Miss Yule of Tarradale and several other lady members, had threatened the then secretary that they would certainly go to the dinner, and he was very much put about at the prospect'.⁷⁴

As early as 1872, there was in fact a plea made for 'Ladies' to be present at the 'Annual Supper', on the grounds that 'the co-operation of the silken cords of all society – the bonds that bind men in peace and harmony with each other – would certainly be a most potent auxiliary to such societies as ours and our kindred brethren'.⁷⁵ The suggestion clearly fell on deaf ears, but although the Gaelic Society of Inverness was not out of step with a number of similar societies formed around the same period in limiting women's participation,⁷⁶ it was the Society's reluctance to change that women like Ella Carmichael and others were seeking to challenge.

⁷⁰ 'Complimentary Dinner to Mr W. J. Watson', *TGSI*, 27 (1908–1911), 170–184 (178).

⁷¹ 'Annual Dinner', *TGSI*, 27 (1908–1911), 237–250 (238 & 239).

⁷² Minutes of Gaelic Society of Inverness, 31 Jan 1923.

⁷³ *TGSI*, 32 (1924–25).

⁷⁴ 'Annual Dinner', *TGSI*, 33 (1925–1927), 270–176 (276).

⁷⁵ 'The Annual Supper', *TGSI*, 2 (1872–73), 49–65 (61).

⁷⁶ For wider discussion of the advent of similar societies and their gendered divisions see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1987]), 419–429).

Edinburgh University Celtic Society

When Ella Carmichael began classes in Celtic at Edinburgh University in the early 1890s,⁷⁷ it must have been particularly frustrating for her to discover that membership of the University Celtic Society was not open to women. The situation was perhaps understandable in the first years of women studying at the university when a period of adjustment might be allowed to accommodate the fact that women were now part of university life in general; Glasgow University Ossianic Society admitted women in 1899, while the Celtic Society in Aberdeen University had its first woman member in 1897. The situation in Edinburgh, however, became somewhat farcical with the subject of admitting women being regularly debated at successive Annual General Meetings and always defeated. At the start of the 1919 academic session, an alternative women's society was instigated and the Secretary of the Celtic Society 'was directed to congratulate the newly-formed Edinburgh University Women's Celtic Society on its birth and to express hopes of future friendly relations between the Societies'.⁷⁸ Although no minutes for the Women's Celtic Society have been located, it is surprising that the separatist route was chosen at a time when the case for admitting women could have been strongly argued on the grounds of women's participation in the war effort, and on the back of the Representation of the People Act 1918 which gave the vote to a limited sector of women. The two societies, however, continued in parallel form, occasionally coming together for 'inter-debates',⁷⁹ until the outbreak of the Second World War forced them together, although it was anticipated that this would only be 'for the duration of the war'. At a joint meeting on 19th October 1946 the subject of 'whether the Society was to remain as it was or to split up into the men's Celtic Society and the Women's Celtic Society' was discussed. On a final vote being taken the decision to remain as one society – the Edinburgh University Highland Society – was carried by a majority of twenty votes.⁸⁰ Ella Carmichael did not live to see the Celtic Society of her Alma Mater finally embracing gender inclusivity in 1946, something she would

⁷⁷ The first female undergraduates at the University of Edinburgh were admitted in 1892. Ella Carmichael is named in this group, at the age of 21, in the Faculty of Arts.

<<http://www.archives.lib.ed.ac.uk/students/search.php?view=results&surname=Carmichael>>

⁷⁸ EUA GD16, Box EUA-A-120–124, Minute 5 Oct 1919.

⁷⁹ 'That the Celt is by nature a Flirt' was debated in Feb 1928, an example of the 'lighter' topics that were favoured when women were involved.

⁸⁰ Edinburgh University Celtic Society Minute Book, 1939–1947. Edinburgh University Archives, GD16, Box EUA-A-120 – 124.

surely have celebrated. At the time of her untimely death in 1928, Professor Donald MacLean DD, in an appreciation, referred to her response to the all-male Celtic Society at the university:

Over thirty years ago Ella Carmichael sat with the present writer at the feet of that most genial of teachers, Professor Donald MacKinnon. [...] Ladies were not then so numerous in the class-rooms as they are to-day, and they were not then entitled to membership in the University Celtic Society. Not to be defeated of her purpose by such a proscription, she founded another society, which is still flourishing, and where Celtic subjects are discussed with better purpose and more balanced judgement than in the heated atmosphere of a University Society.⁸¹

Ella Carmichael possibly realised quite quickly how entrenched the university Celtic Society was as an all-male club, and also, as one of a small minority of women students, she perhaps thought better of drawing attention to herself by any protest. In addition she would not want to cause any upset for Professor MacKinnon, a family friend, and indeed for her father, who frequented the Society. It seems clear from Donald MacLean's comment quoted above that it was in response to her exclusion from the University Celtic Society that Ella Carmichael decided to form 'another society', namely the Celtic Union, which she began with her brother Eoghan in 1894. It was, not surprisingly, particularly receptive to women's participation, and a close examination of the broad scope of its activities provides an insight into the dual Gaelic and Celtic vision and activism of Ella Carmichael and the artistic and scholarly networks with which she interacted.

The Celtic Union

In February 1894, Alexander Carmichael wrote in a letter to his good friend Father Allan McDonald that: 'Professor Geddes is most desirous to bring about a Celtic Revival and we must all help',⁸² and it was later that same year that his son and daughter, Ella and Eoghan Carmichael, instigated the Celtic Union in Edinburgh. The aims of the group were described as 'the furtherance of Celtic research, and the Language, Music, Art, Costume and Archaeology of the Celts, more especially of

⁸¹ 'A Tribute', *Northern Chronicle*, 5 Nov 1928; reprinted in *TGSI*, 32 (1929), xi–xiii.

⁸² Alexander Carmichael to Father Allan McDonald, 15 Feb 1894. Canna House Letters.

Scotland',⁸³ and further that '[d]iverging from the usual stereotyped formation of societies, the executive here consists of both ladies and gentlemen'.⁸⁴ Refusing to consider either a single-sex women's group, as was common in the period, or to follow the traditional pattern of a mixed organisation with women in subordinate positions, Ella Carmichael's aspiration for the Celtic Union was a modern society where gender-equality underpinned all areas of its structure and activities.

The broad scope of Celtic interests embraced by the Celtic Union attracted support from various intellectual and artistic networks in Edinburgh, including Celtic Revival enthusiasts, as well as a goodly representation from the Gaelic middle-classes in the capital, many of whom were in the various circles of the Carmichael family. Reflecting the overarching ethos of gender parity, there were two honorary bards appointed, Miss Alice C. MacDonell of Keppoch and Mr Neil MacLeod. At the 'social gathering' held to open the third session of the group in 1896, it was reported that 'over a hundred ladies and gentlemen were present'.⁸⁵ Not surprisingly, women frequently featured as office-bearers and lecturers, and at this meeting Miss Jane Hay, a close friend of Ella Carmichael, was in the chair. In her welcoming remarks she told those present that 'the society was meant not only to stimulate the members to study the past of the Celt – gloriously worthy of study as that was – but to encourage and stimulate them to do equally in the present and to eclipse both past and present in the future'. The 1905–06 Session⁸⁶ named Alexander Carmichael and Professor MacKinnon as Honorary Presidents, and Ella Carmichael as one of four Vice-Presidents. The syllabus for the same period included two speakers from Ireland, Lord Castletown and W. B. Yeats, and Henry Jenner from Cornwall, illustrating the influential pan-Celtic connections which the Carmichaels had by this time established.

In 1904 there was a determination from within the Celtic Union that it should be doing more to assist the 'revival of Gaelic' aside from the general Celtic lecture programme of the group. A Sub-Committee of three was formed including Ella Carmichael and her hand can be seen in all the Gaelic-focused activities initiated by the Celtic Union around this time, including classes for Gaelic and Celtic Art, a

⁸³ 'Society Notes', *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 54.

⁸⁴ 'Notes from Edinburgh: The "Celtic Union"', *OT*, 10 Nov 1894.

⁸⁵ 'Edinburgh Celtic Union', *OT*, 7 Nov 1896.

⁸⁶ 'Society Notes', *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 54.

Gaelic choir and the organisation of a local Mòd. The Gaelic classes were begun early in 1904 to which, as was intimated, ‘all desirous of learning to speak Gaelic, and Highlanders who already know the language and are desirous of learning to read it, are cordially invited to attend’.⁸⁷ That the classes aimed to address the Gaelic literacy needs of native speakers, as well as encouraging new speakers, is worthy of note; the lack of a Gaelic reading public was an important factor in the uncertain sustainability of Gaelic publications but there was not any great effort being made to improve the situation. The classes were immediately popular to the extent that there was a need to find larger rooms to accommodate them, and there were seven teachers in all, six males and Ella Carmichael.⁸⁸ In 1908, with the work of creating interest and attracting teachers having been done by the Celtic Union over the previous four years, the Gaelic classes were taken over by Edinburgh School Board to be conducted as ‘evening continuation classes’, an arrangement that was described as ‘a great advantage to the Gaelic cause and we trust that we will soon hear of other School Boards following the good example of Edinburgh’.⁸⁹ It was primarily by way of giving those who were taking part in the classes a chance to test their ability in the language that the Celtic Union decided to hold its first local Mòd in 1904. In intimating news of this event to Malcolm MacFarlane, Henry Whyte commented with some sarcasm on the subject: ‘Since we won’t run the Mod as the Carmichaels desire they are going to run several Mods of their own – and show us how to do it. So we can take a back seat’.⁹⁰ Ella Carmichael was probably aware that her enthusiasm was not always reciprocated from certain quarters but she was not one to drop an idea just because obstacles were put in her way. The Celtic Union, therefore, provided her with a forum in which to introduce her Gaelic and Celtic initiatives in the knowledge that she had the encouragement and support of family friends and artistic networks who were more than willing to put some of her more ambitious ideas into practice. Her visits to Ireland were influential in this respect and she was obviously enthused by what she saw and experienced there. No doubt the prominent part women played in the activities of the Gaelic League was also a strong influence on this partiality. Writing to a family friend, the priest and Gaelic scholar Father

⁸⁷ ‘Edinburgh Celtic Union’, *OT*, 20 Feb 1904.

⁸⁸ ‘Edinburgh Gaelic Classes’, *OT*, 19 March 1904.

⁸⁹ ‘Comunn Branches, Gaelic Classes, Ceilidhs and Affairs’, *DG*, 3 (1907–08), 186.

⁹⁰ Henry Whyte to Malcolm MacFarlane, March 1904. NLS Acc. 9736/150.

Allan McDonald, after what was possibly her first Irish trip in 1901, her enthusiasm and admiration are more than evident: ‘Ireland and its people are simply delightful [...] and they are all so patriotic [...] I wish we could get up the Celtic enthusiasm they have and work at it in as practical a way’.⁹¹ On this trip Ella Carmichael had attended the Pan-Celtic Congress in Dublin, representing the Celtic Union, after which she travelled with her father and brother to Galway for Feis Connacht. In an article she wrote afterwards for *Am Bàrd* she was effusive in her praise of the Irish language movement:

What [the Irish] do for their nationality and all that word implies must win admiration from all. Their triumph will be glorious. It is only a very few years since the Gaelic League sprang into existence, yet it is already a power in the land, and the work it does in spreading and developing not only the study of the language, but its *use*, is little short of marvellous.⁹²

It was through the Celtic Union and the membership it attracted, including the Celtic Revival networks and the Gaelic scholars that gravitated to the Carmichaels’ door, that Ella Carmichael was able to implement in Edinburgh some of what she recognised as successful in the Irish revival. One such example was the performance of ‘Snìomh an t-Sugain’, given at the first Celtic Union Mòd in 1904.⁹³ This play was a Gaelic version of ‘Casadh an tSúgáin’, written by Douglas Hyde and based on a song from his collection, *Love Songs of Connacht*.⁹⁴ The original play was first performed in October 1901, in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, with Hyde himself taking part supported by a cast of Gaelic League members, and it was an immediate popular success.⁹⁵ The narrative is centred on a ‘sweet-talking poet’ who makes unwelcome advances to a young woman and is put out of the house by the trick of inciting him to twist a hay rope till he passes backwards over the threshold.⁹⁶ Its Dublin premiere was described as:

⁹¹ Ella Carmichael, Edinburgh to Father Allan McDonald, 10 Sept 1901. Canna House Letters.

⁹² E. C. Carmichael, ‘Feis Connacht’, *Am Bàrd*, 1 (1901), 53–55 (54).

⁹³ The Gaelic play was followed by a performance in English of ‘The Pot of Broth’ by W. B. Yeats.

⁹⁴ Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 320.

⁹⁵ See Janet Egleson Dunleavy & Gareth W. Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde: A Maker of Modern Ireland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 219–221. This passage gives a fascinating account of the writing of the play when Hyde and his wife were the guests of Lady Gregory for a few days, along with W. B. Yeats.

⁹⁶ Kiberd, *Irish Classics*, 320.

The greatest artistic treat we have had for a long time. It was all so natural so delightfully real and native of the soil that a new sense of widened possibilities of Gaelic enjoyment was brought irresistibly home to the Irish public who thronged to see it.⁹⁷

One of the reasons for the play's success, apart from the narrative and the humour involved, was that it was written in simple language that was accessible to the many learners of Irish who had managed to progress 'through O'Growney's simple lessons', giving them a sense that they were now 'truly in touch with their Gaelic culture'.⁹⁸ The instant success of 'Casadh an tSúgáin' in 1901 raised hopes for the future of an Irish-language theatre and while in reality this was a very over-optimistic reaction, the play was important as a catalyst for that vision and the protracted debate and discussion that ensued.⁹⁹ A similar glowing reception to the Scottish Gaelic version of the play was voiced in an enthusiastic speech given by Rev. Dr George Henderson at the end of the performance in Edinburgh: 'They had been privileged to be present at a great birth. He hoped they would remember that they had gazed on what was but the beginning of a great awakening'.¹⁰⁰ The play worked in its Gaelic dress for similar reasons to those that had made it a success in Ireland – it was not overly taxing on the Gaelic-speaking performers, most of whom would have been totally new to dramatic performance, and it was linguistically accessible to an audience of varying Gaelic ability. The Gaelic translation in the hands of Kenneth MacLeod would no doubt have been accomplished with an ear readily attuned to natural idiomatic Gaelic, giving it an authenticity that native Gaelic speakers would relate to positively. Although the Carmichaels' trip to Ireland in 1901 was too early to coincide with the first performance of 'Casadh an tSúgáin', they would certainly have heard or read later of its success. It seems more than coincidental that around March 1902, Ella Carmichael approached An Comunn to suggest the performance of a 'Celtic play' at the Mòd that year.¹⁰¹ The suggestion

⁹⁷ 'An Irish National Theatre', *Celtia*, 1 (1901), 170.

⁹⁸ Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde: A Maker of Modern Ireland*, 221.

⁹⁹ Philip O'Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881–1921: Ideology and Innovation* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 294–98.

¹⁰⁰ 'Mòd Dhun Eideann', *OT*, 1 June 1904.

¹⁰¹ John MacKintosh, Inverness (Acting Sec. and Treasurer for An Comunn) to Malcolm MacFarlane, 2 April 1902. NLS Acc. 9736/137. This letter states: 'I also enclose a letter which I have from Miss Carmichael Edinburgh with reference to the proposed competition for a ladies choir and also as to performing a Celtic play at the Mod. Kindly let me have your view on these subjects'.

was not carried through but for the first time a category for a Gaelic play was included in the literary competitions at the Mòd, although in fact no entries were forthcoming. If the opposition to the suggestion of a dramatic production at the Mòd was on the grounds that there were no Gaelic plays available, and if there was a further rebuff when the competition to create such a play drew a complete blank, it illustrates Ella Carmichael's commitment to the idea, and her tenacity, that she should turn to an Irish play that was 'tried and tested', and to facilitate its performance within her own circle. It also highlights that she had the necessary Irish connections to obtain the permissions from the author and the Irish Literary Theatre Company in order to perform the play, and the Gaelic connections to have it well translated. The play was performed again at Féill a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich in 1907, although the title was modified on that occasion to 'Toinneamh an t-Sugain'.

Another aspect of language promotion in Ireland that Ella Carmichael identified as potentially transferrable to the Gaelic movement in Scotland was the Irish Language Week organised annually in Dublin by the Gaelic League, the centrepiece of which was a large and colourful parade of floats and marchers passing through the streets of Dublin.¹⁰² A comment in a letter she wrote to Malcolm MacFarlane indicates that she had suggested the idea to him but that he did not particularly share her enthusiasm: 'You don't approve of my holding up the Irish example but why could we not have a language week to get the members residing in southern towns to collect for us? I think something might be done'.¹⁰³ While MacFarlane was also an admirer of the Irish movement, it was their political aspirations and the place of the Irish language in that vision that he esteemed rather than what he probably thought were mere distractions, although in fact the propagandist message was very much at the core of the Language Week parade. He was also very conservative by nature and possibly the least likely of those in positions of influence in the Gaelic movement to be enthused with the idea of a public procession. There was, however, a particular dramatic form used by the Gaelic League in their annual language week procession, and in other areas of their work, that particularly attracted Ella Carmichael. The performance genre known as *tableau vivant* was developed in support of the nationalist cause, including its use in

¹⁰² See Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 187–210.

¹⁰³ E. C. Carmichael, Edinburgh to Malcolm MacFarlane. 20 March 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/130.

the propaganda work of the Gaelic League, by Alice Milligan (1866–1953), recreating scenes from ideologically relevant historical or mythological events, and occasionally representing contemporary issues, although the former themes were more popular.¹⁰⁴ However, with the all-female nationalist group, Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Erin), Alice Milligan was able to extend the use of *tableau vivant* as a means of promoting female empowerment through the participation of women and also in depicting strong, independent female figures, mythological and real, from the Irish past.¹⁰⁵ Founded in October 1900, Inghinidhe na hÉireann had the overarching aim of re-establishing ‘the complete independence of Ireland’ but more generally aimed ‘to prove women’s capabilities and to claim women’s rightful place within the heart of the nationalist revival’.¹⁰⁶ The group first performed a programme of plays and *tableaux vivants* in Dublin in April and August 1901.¹⁰⁷ It is not known whether Ella Carmichael saw the August performance when she attended the Celtic Congress or, as is more likely, she may have seen *tableaux* performed at the Oireachtas in 1902. Inspired to try something similar, she found a willing and receptive cast in the artistic and Celtic Revival elements of the Celtic Union membership. *Tableaux vivants* enjoyed general popularity in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries, and apart from a familiarity with the genre, a number of the Celtic Union members would no doubt have responded to its blend of art, costume and pageantry. An important factor in the success of the medium in the Irish context was that it sidestepped the politics of language so that it was accessible to both participant and audience without having to embrace English. For less ideological reasons, this aspect would also have made *tableaux vivants* attractive to the members of the Celtic Union, both as performers and audience, many of whom had only a minimal knowledge of Gaelic.

¹⁰⁴ McMahon, *Grand Opportunity*, 197–201. See also Philip O’Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival*, 170–71. Alice Milligan was a member of the Tableaux Committee of the Gaelic League from 1902. For a discussion of *tableau vivant* in the context of the Irish Revival, and of its importance for women in particular, see Catherine Morris, *Alice Milligan and the Irish Cultural Revival* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013 [2012]), 252–277; and Catherine Morris, ‘Alice Milligan: Republican Tableaux and the Revival’, *Field Day Review*, 6 (2010), 133–165.

¹⁰⁵ See Morris, ‘Republican Tableaux’, 153; Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 55; Karen Steele, *Women, Press and Politics during the Irish Revival* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 77. In May 1905, Alice Milligan created a *tableau* depicting ‘the significant role taken by women in the language movement’. See ‘Republican Tableaux’, 142.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne* (London: Pandora, 1990), 64–66.

¹⁰⁷ Morris, ‘Republican Tableaux’, 152.

The series of *tableaux* presented at the Celtic Union Mòd of 1906 was based on scenes from the story of Deirdre, the Ossianic Cycle, and the life of Columba.¹⁰⁸ The Carmichael involvement was central, with the scenes from the story of Deirdre based on Alexander Carmichael's version of the legend that had only just been published the previous year;¹⁰⁹ narration for the production was by W. J. Watson; Ella Carmichael took part, her representation of Gráinne described in a report as 'of a dark, splendid and passionate beauty'; and her brother Eoghan was the leading figure in the depiction of 'Oisín an deigh na Feinne'.¹¹⁰ The scene chosen for Ella Carmichael's part was the betrothal feast for Fionn and Gráinne, an apposite choice perhaps as her marriage to W. J. Watson was only a matter of weeks away.¹¹¹ However, taking into account recent research that posits Ella Carmichael as the 'Celtic Muse' of the Celtic Revival artist John Duncan,¹¹² the choice of this particular mythological love triangle might also reflect a degree of personal sentiment on the part of Duncan, who directed the staging of the *tableaux*.¹¹³

The duality of perspective within the Celtic Union can be seen in reports of the *tableaux vivants* in both English and Gaelic. The *Oban Times* report was obviously written by someone close to the event and very much of a Celtic Revival mind-set, posing the romance of the heroic past against the utility of the modern age:

We hope that one of the tableaux, that of "Na Feinne [*sic*] air a h-uileann" is prophetic of the awakening of this old spirit of heroic romance in the art of Scotland, and that this beginning of the Celtic Union will be followed up by poets and painters, who will bring back to

¹⁰⁸ 'Tableaux Vivants at the Edinburgh Mòd', *OT*, 9 June 1906. The following year, 1907, Ella Carmichael directed a similar programme of tableaux vivants in Inverness for which she was praised for 'accurate representations'. Her husband again provided an account of the narrative before each scene was revealed. 'Celtic Tableaux at Inverness', *OT*, 13 April 1907.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Carmichael, *Deirdre and the Lay of the Children of Uisne* (Edinburgh: Norman MacLeod, 1905), for which the artist John Duncan provided the frontispiece.

¹¹⁰ 'Tableaux Vivants at the Edinburgh Mòd', *OT*, 9 June 1906.

¹¹¹ They were married on 7 July 1906.

¹¹² Murdo MacDonald, 'The Visual Dimension of *Carmina Gadelica*', in *The Life & Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008), 135–145. There is a strong case, as MacDonald suggests, for Duncan's female image of *Anima Celtica* published in *Evergreen* in 1895 to be inspired by Ella Carmichael. The fact that the Celtic Union had been initiated the previous year and Duncan is recorded as being present at the inaugural social meeting, confirms that he knew Ella Carmichael at the time he made the illustration. However, while the evidence is strong, it is not unequivocal.

¹¹³ 'Tableaux Vivants at the Edinburgh Mòd', *OT*, 9 June 1906.

us in these days of collars and cuffs many an ancestral memory of a splendid forgotten life.¹¹⁴

The *tableaux vivants* were, however, also reported enthusiastically in Gaelic:

Bithidh an céilidh ainmeil gu h-àraidh air son feala-dhà sonraichte a bha aig a' chuideachd. 'S e *tableaux* a chanadh na Frangaich ris – 's e sin air eadar theangachadh riochdachadh. Bha caob no dhà air a ghabhail as a sgialachd eireachdail ud a thug Mac 'ille mhicheil dhuinn air Deirdre – agus feadhainn a dol ann a' riochd na seann laoch 's a sealltuinn dhuinn fa chomhair ar sùl dìreach mar a thachair a réir na sgeoil. [...] Bha gach ni cho poncail air a dheanamh 's gun robh a' chuideachd gu léir anabarrach riaraichte leis na chunnaic 's leis na chuala iad.¹¹⁵

Yet another strand of Ella Carmichael's Gaelic work in connection with the Celtic Union was founding (c1902) the Edinburgh Ladies Gaelic Choir. In a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane from June 1902, she expresses her thanks 'for so kindly thinking of my choir. The songs will be very useful [...] and the harmonies seem pretty',¹¹⁶ which suggests that MacFarlane had, without prompting, sent her some Gaelic songs suitably harmonised for ladies' voices, aware that there was limited if any music available in Gaelic arranged for a female choir. There was in fact no competition at the Mòd for Ladies' Choirs until Ella Carmichael instigated this category for the 1902 Mòd at Dundee and donated the prize money of five pounds.¹¹⁷ In 1904 she began a 'mixed' choir, writing to MacFarlane at the time: 'I was not at all desirous of having a mixed choir but having refused three or four sets of petitions last session I had to give in to the petitions of 19 men this session – they put it so flatteringly!'¹¹⁸ This choir was presented as Edinburgh Gaelic Choir under the baton of Archibald Menzies, a Gaelic speaker and a stalwart of An Comunn Gàidhealach from its inception. Around 1907 the choir became part of what was known as the Edinburgh Gaelic Musical Association (affiliated to the Celtic Union) with Neil Orr

¹¹⁴ 'Tableaux Vivants at the Edinburgh Mòd', *OT*, 9 June 1906. Clearly this was written by someone with little knowledge of Gaelic, thus the mistake of 'Na Feinne' rather than 'An Fhèinn'.

¹¹⁵ 'Mòd Dhun Eideann', *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 154. This report was possibly written by Rev. Dr Malcolm MacLennan (1862–1931) who convened the editorial committee of *DG* after Malcolm MacFarlane's short-lived editorship ended. He was minister of St Columba's UF Church in Edinburgh at the time, and assisted the Rev Dr Robert Blair at the marriage ceremony of Ella Carmichael and W. J. Watson.

¹¹⁶ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, 17 June 1902. NLS Acc. 9736/133.

¹¹⁷ Printed material relating to An Comunn Gàidhealach. NLS Acc. 9736/77.

¹¹⁸ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, 28 Jan 1904. NLS Acc. 9736/133.

as conductor, and Archibald Menzies as its first president.¹¹⁹ Ella Carmichael did not sing herself – she related this to a problem with her tonsils when she was young¹²⁰ – and conducting was not considered a position suitable for a woman, but she was still very involved with the choir, and in fact she could be credited with creating the first Gaelic choir in Edinburgh.

It seems very likely that one of the reasons that Ella Carmichael set up the Celtic Union in the first place was to create a new group where male and female participation was on an equal footing and where Gaelic, Celtic and pan-Celtic networks could come together. At the time, as discussed in chapter 2, An Comunn Gàidhealach was overwhelmingly male in its leadership; the Gaelic Society of Inverness was likewise male-dominated; and the University Celtic Society, considered above, offered no place to women. As it turned out, it was as a representative of the Celtic Union that Ella Carmichael was able to gain positions in An Comunn Gàidhealach, and similarly it allowed her to be an official participant at the first formal Pan-Celtic Congress held in Dublin in 1901, an occasion that introduced her to many of the main players in the Celtic Revival movement.

Pan-Celtic Circles

It is clear that Ella Carmichael saw the Gaelic movement as being a distinct current in a pan-Celtic stream along with the cultural movements of the other Celtic countries, and that she embraced a dual perspective that was both Gaelic and Celtic, although the former was her priority, as her various initiatives to encourage the language through the Celtic Union and An Comunn Gàidhealach show. Her university studies would have provided a wider context for her Gaelic heritage, and her visits to Ireland only served to enhance this understanding. The Celtic Union was conceived within this cultural arena and the *Celtic Review*, the periodical she instituted and edited from 1904, as will be discussed in chapter 5, was situated in a similar pan-Celtic framework, and inspired and facilitated by her influential Gaelic and pan-Celtic networks. Therefore the first formal Pan-Celtic Congress of the Celtic Association held in Dublin in August 1901, was clearly going to be an attractive prospect for her. There were nineteen ‘Highland Delegates’ at the Dublin

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Edinburgh Gaelic Music Association 1908–1927. NLS Acc. 12624.

¹²⁰ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, 28 Jan 1904. NLS Acc. 9736 /133.

Congress,¹²¹ a cross-section of the different Gaelic and Celtic Revival networks of the time, including Malcolm MacFarlane, Theodore Napier, Archibald Sinclair,¹²² Ruairaidh Erskine of Marr, Patrick Geddes and J. Stuart Glennie, as well as Alexander, Eoghan and Ella Carmichael. There were two other female delegates, Miss Jessie MacBride, the young daughter of Mr A. S. MacBride, who performed on the clarsach; and Miss Mary MacLean,¹²³ who Malcolm MacFarlane had invited to attend to provide sung illustrations for the lecture he delivered on Gaelic song. In contrast to the other two women, Ella Carmichael, although accompanied by her father and brother, was a delegate in her own right representing the Celtic Union.

Alexander Carmichael was one of a group of representatives from each Celtic nation who delivered short addresses in their native language at the opening ceremony of the 1901 Congress and was clearly seen by the organisers as the ‘elder statesman’ of the Scottish party. In addition, with *Carmina Gadelica* only a year in print, ‘the distinguished author’¹²⁴ was already something of a ‘Celtic’ celebrity, and therefore his daughter was guaranteed the attention of the most influential figures in the pan-Celtic movement. On her return from Dublin, Ella Carmichael wrote in a letter to Father Allan that in Ireland she and her brother ‘came in for good times on [their father’s] account’ adding, with reference to *Carmina Gadelica* that ‘it is far better known and appreciated in Ireland than it is here’.¹²⁵ Certainly Alexander Carmichael’s work with its emphasis on restoring the cultural worth and wisdom of the Gaelic ‘folk’¹²⁶ chimed with the ideology underpinning many aspects of the Celtic Revival *Zeitgeist* and it is therefore not surprising that the Irish poet W. B. Yeats, also attending the Dublin Congress, recognised the Carmichaels as kindred spirits. Yeats commented in a letter to Lady Gregory that among those delegates [to the Congress] that he had persuaded to go to the Galway Feis were ‘Old Carmichael

¹²¹ ‘Opening of the Congress’, *Celtia*, 1 (1901), 131. Apologies were received from Professor Donald MacKinnon and Miss Yule of Tarradale.

¹²² This must have been the grandson of Archibald Sinclair, the founder of the Celtic Press, and whose father was also Archibald Sinclair (1850–1899).

<<http://www.carmichaelwatson.lib.ed.ac.uk/cwatson/en/eacpersonentry/GB-237-EAC-p3990>> [Accessed 26 Nov 2012]

¹²³ A native of Mull. There are a number of her letters to Malcolm MacFarlane in NLS Acc. 9736.

¹²⁴ *Carmina Gadelica* was still making waves, having been published in the summer of 1900.

¹²⁵ Ella C. Carmichael to Father Allan McDonald, 19 Sept 1901. Canna House Letters.

¹²⁶ See Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, ‘Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*’ in *The Life & Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008), 1–43; and Donald E. Meek, ‘Faking the ‘True Gael’? *Carmina Gadelica* and the Beginning of Modern Gaelic Scholarship’, *Aiste*, 1 (2007), 76–106.

(author of *Carmina Gadelica*) and his daughter a very charming person who is a scholar in both Irish and Scottish Gaelic', adding in another letter 'I want you to look out for the Carmichaels and be nice to them. [...] Old Carmichael has done beautiful literary work and is our business'.¹²⁷ Yeats was therefore not only acquainted with *Carmina Gadelica* but also admired it and identified with its content. However, a more intriguing link, and perhaps not unconnected with Yeats' enthusiasm for the book, is the fact that his muse and first love, the feminist and Irish nationalist, Maud Gonne, had also found inspiration within its pages. In choosing St Brigid (sometimes Bride and in Gaelic, Brìghde) as an inspiring female patron for Inghinidhe na hÉireann, Maude Gonne inaugurated their first formal meeting with a lecture on 'the Goddess Brigid', later reprinted in the *United Irishman*.¹²⁸ Describing the customs associated with the feast day of Brìghde, the first day of February, Maud Gonne acknowledged her source for the information on these traditions as being Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*.¹²⁹ She focused in her lecture on the pre-Christian image of Brìghde rather than that of the 'foster-mother of Christ', highlighting the making of a corn figure of the goddess by young women on the eve of St Bride's Day, which they then decorated with spring flowers and paraded around the community. When they then locked themselves in a house to prepare the Feast of Bride, they importantly 'set Bride where she may see and be seen of all'. Later the young men of the community would 'come humbly asking permission to honour Bride [and] [a]fter some parleying they are admitted to make obeisance to her'.¹³⁰ As Karen Steele points out, this depiction of women in 'a central authoritative role' was an empowering one for Inghinidhe na hÉireann to adopt in their contemporary situation.¹³¹ It is tantalising to speculate on whether Maud Gonne met the Carmichaels, and Ella in particular, at the time of the 1901 Congress. They were

¹²⁷ *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats, 1901–04*, ed. by John Kelly and Ronald Schuchard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 74.

¹²⁸ Maud Gonne, 'The Goddess Brigid', *United Irishman*, 3 Nov 1900; Reference in Steele, note 53, 222.

¹²⁹ Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics*, 84. Carmichael provides considerable detail on the traditions and activities connected to 'Latha Fheil Brighde' in the first volume of *Carmina Gadelica*, including variations from Irish tradition. See *Carmina Gadelica*, I (Edinburgh: T & A Constable, 1900), 164–173.

¹³⁰ Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I, 167.

¹³¹ Steele, *Women, Press, and Politics*, 84.

certainly in Dublin at the same time,¹³² although it is unlikely that the cultural nationalist activities of the Pan-Celtic movement held any great attraction for the Irish activist, and indeed many in the Gaelic League had refused to get involved for similar ideological reasons.¹³³ Whatever might have separated them politically, the two women shared a desire to recall strong women from Celtic tradition to endorse a female role in their respective causes. When Ella Carmichael addressed the Celtic Association in Dublin in May 1902 on ‘Gaelic Culture’, she too gave prominence to St Bride as an example of ‘the honourable position occupied by women’ in ancient Celtic society. She also refuted the view of the feminine ‘spirit of the Celt’ that Matthew Arnold had emphasised,¹³⁴ and by association she was also rejecting his perception of the feminine as sensitive, emotional and inferior. Somewhat enigmatically, however, Ella Carmichael concluded her address by appealing to ‘the higher spirit [of the Celt] revealed in a Scottish artist’s address to “*Anima Celtica*”’,¹³⁵ which must surely refer to John Duncan’s illustration in *Evergreen*, already mentioned. It seems clear that she was citing the illustration as a depiction of a strong and intellectual feminine figure with which to contradict the version of Celtic femininity propagated by Arnold. However, the reference adds to the intrigue surrounding the image and the question of who was the inspiration for it; it would seem very unlikely that Ella Carmichael would refer to the illustration in a public speech if she had any inkling that she herself was its subject, but her comment does reveal that it was an allegorical image that she approved of.

Whatever the truth behind the Celtic muse depicted in ‘*Anima Celtica*’, it was certainly the case that there was a particular quality in the appearance and manner of Ella Carmichael that some men imagined as an ideal of Celtic womanhood. For example, a Breton delegate, many years after the Congress in Dublin, recalled the Carmichaels and Ella in particular:

¹³² Inghinidhe na hÉireann performed ‘Eilís agus an Bhean Déirce’ in Dublin on 27 Aug 1901. (O’Leary, *The Prose Literature*, 295) This was part of a week of performances, including the *tableaux vivants*, already referred to, and another two plays. As part of one of the plays, Maud Gonne read out the legend of Red Hugh. See Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries*, 55–56.

¹³³ See Philip O’Leary, “‘Children of the same mother’: Gaelic Relations with other Celtic Revival Movements 1882–1916’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 6 (1989), 101–130.

¹³⁴ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867).

¹³⁵ ‘Celtic Association: Annual Conversazione’, *Celtia*, 2 (1902), 85–87 (87).

Dr Alexander Carmichael [...] was accompanied by his daughter Ella, who was 21 years of age like myself. She was a beautiful girl, tall, and haughty. There emanated from her an impression of dignity. In my mind I compared her to Flora MacDonald, Prince Charlie's friend, whose statue faces the sea at Inverness. Like Flora, Ella wore the national costume of her Clan. Together we visited Killarney's Lakes and she tried to teach me some Gaelic. She presented me with a *Course of Gaelic Grammar* by Duncan Reid.¹³⁶

It was perhaps the romance of the moment and the conjuring up of the image of Flora MacDonald and the Prince that made François Jaffrennou¹³⁷ imagine that Ella Carmichael was only twenty-one, and therefore the same age as himself, when she was in fact ten years older. The reference to the 'national costume of her clan' was also an imagined projection onto what was a fairly conservative tartan skirt and tweed jacket,¹³⁸ but a focus on reviving national dress was very much in tune with the Pan-Celtic ideology, and the subject was discussed in detail at the Dublin Congress. As part of this dialogue, the Welsh delegate, Gwyneth Vaughan, highlighted the gender dimension of national dress stating that:

As a woman who has been called an advanced woman – and had been christened sometimes an apostle of the new woman, she would like very much to be able to rescue her sister women from being dressmaker's dolls such as they were at the present time and she was looking for ideas for an alternative to be adopted in the Principality of Wales.¹³⁹

As a consequence of the resolution adopted in Dublin that 'historical national costumes and practical suggestions for their modern adaption be as far as possible represented in the processions and ceremonies of the next Pan-Celtic Congress',¹⁴⁰ the Caernarfon gathering of 1904 was particularly colourful and, with some justification, attracted the designation 'mad Celts'.¹⁴¹ While some of the women

¹³⁶ F. Jaffrennou-Taldir, *A Short History of the Scottish-Breton Relations* (Rennes: 1953). Printed from a Paper given at the Interceltic Congress (Scotland) 12–18 August 1953. Copy in NLS Acc. 7040/1/i. (Ethel Bassin Papers)

¹³⁷ The Breton poet and nationalist.

¹³⁸ A picture of an unnamed female Scottish delegate published as part of a short article on the Dublin Pan-Celtic Congress in *Tatler* (28 Aug 1901), 407, can be fairly safely identified as Ella Carmichael.

¹³⁹ 'Costume, Customs and Games', *Celtia*, 1 (1901), 139–142, (141).

¹⁴⁰ 'Celtic Congress', *OT*, 31 Aug 1901.

¹⁴¹ See Marion Löffler, *'A Book of Mad Celts', John Wickens and the Celtic Congress of Caernarfon 1904* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2000). An Irish paper in 1901 stated that: 'The ensemble looked like an interval between dances at an al fresco fancy ball', ('Celtic Nations: Congress in Dublin', *Irish Daily Independent and Nation*, 21 August 1901).

were in flowing robes adapted or invented from various historical referents, and Gwyneth Vaughan opted for the copious robes and regalia of the Gorsedd,¹⁴² the Breton and a number of the Welsh women wore their recognised national costume.¹⁴³ Ella Carmichael, however, ever conscious of ‘tradition’ that encouraged a limited perspective on women, and aware of the need to present a modern alternative, was not likely to conform to a traditional domestic image of women as suggested by full skirts, aprons and shawls.¹⁴⁴ She chose to wear an elegant modern dress, tastefully given a ‘Celtic’ character through the interlacing knot patterns embroidered on its collar and cuffs, and also reflected in the large brooches holding her sash in place and adorning her velvet hat. She was thus able to reflect a Celtic and Gaelic identity without compromising her espousal of a modern role for women. Amongst a valuable collection of photographs of the Caernarfon Congress, a striking portrait of Ella Carmichael stands out amongst the images of ‘mad Celts’, for which the ‘beautiful, tall and haughty’ description, quoted above, is entirely appropriate.¹⁴⁵

Although the Pan-Celtic movement was a noticeably gender-inclusive environment, Ella Carmichael was the only female in the Scottish delegation at Caernarfon, as she was at Dublin with the exception of the musical performers. In that respect she was staking new territory for female pan-Celtic participation. John MacKay, the editor of the *Celtic Monthly*, was clearly unable to accept a woman representing the Gaelic cause in this way, writing to Malcolm MacFarlane:

When you go [to the Congress] for any sake keep that theatrical blue stocking, Miss E. C. from making fools of Highlanders by swaggering about & lecturing in the[ir] name. [...] It is ridiculous to have a woman always spouting in the name of Gaeldom! Take the representation in hand yourself, & give the Carmichaels a rest.¹⁴⁶

It is revealing that he chose to invoke the ‘blue stocking’ stereotype which had been the standard denigration in the nineteenth century for any woman exhibiting

¹⁴² While this avoided the traditional ‘dressmaker’s doll’ look with its links to the domestic context, it was not the best choice in support of a modern national image for Welsh women.

¹⁴³ See Löffler, ‘*A Book of Mad Celts*’.

¹⁴⁴ The gendering of national dress is discussed in Ida Blom, ‘Gender and Nation in International Comparison’, in *Gendered Nations*, ed. by Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall, (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 3–26.

¹⁴⁵ Löffler, ‘*A Book of Mad Celts*’, 45.

¹⁴⁶ John MacKay to Malcolm MacFarlane, 18 Aug 1904. NLS Acc. 9736/ 133. In 1908, Neil Orr referred in a letter to MacFarlane to ‘Lady Watson’s Salon’, (Neil Orr to Malcolm MacFarlane, 8 June 1908. NLS Acc. 9736/135), a phrase that confines the intellectual woman to a specific female space.

‘intellectual confidence’, but in the early twentieth century was targeted specifically at the pioneering women academics.¹⁴⁷ However, in the Pan-Celtic context, Ella Carmichael was in the supportive company of other ‘blue stockings’ who shared her interests, not just Gwyneth Vaughan and Agnes O’Farrelly, but also Eleanor Hull, a scholar of Irish and secretary of the Irish Texts Society, whose book *Pagan Ireland* had been published that year. Ella Carmichael had of course just launched the *Celtic Review*, and when a committee was formed at Caernarfon to appeal to the government for a grant on behalf of Celtic research, both she and Eleanor Hull were included on it.¹⁴⁸ The wider arena of pan-Celtic activity therefore offered women an alternative to the traditional patriarchal circles of formal academia and scholarship and provided a supportive network for their scholarly ambitions, which must surely have enthused Ella Carmichael as a lone female scholar in Gaelic academic circles.

In 1907 the Pan-Celtic Congress came to Edinburgh, when among those lecturing was Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, who spoke on ‘Folk Songs of the Hebrides’, having just returned from a ‘song-collecting tour’. There is no indication of the Carmichaels being present on this occasion, although Margaret Burnley Campbell, who had just been elected President of An Comunn Gàidhealach, now comes into the pan-Celtic picture for the first time. The Edinburgh Congress was not as successful as had been anticipated; it was remarked that that the low attendance from city Gaels was due to it being the traditional time for their summer holiday back to the Gàidhealtachd, although it is more likely that they simply did not connect with the event and its somewhat esoteric ceremonies. The Edinburgh gathering lost money and it was the last Pan-Celtic Congress until 1920 when it again returned to the Scottish capital.

A short report in *DG* put a positive slant on the 1907 Congress, highlighting in particular the lecture by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser.¹⁴⁹ Mrs Kennedy-Fraser had been around the Celtic Union circles from the late 1890s, described by Alexander Carmichael as an ‘ever-willing friend’ after she gave a lecture on ‘Folksongs and music of different nations’ in 1899.¹⁵⁰ She was in the same Celtic Revival networks as John Duncan and it was through the Carmichaels that they both found their way to

¹⁴⁷ See Amanda Vickery, ‘Not just a pretty face’, *Guardian Review*, 8 March 2008.

¹⁴⁸ Ernest Rhys, ‘The Pan-Celtic Congress’, *CR*, 1 (1904–1905), 189–191 (191).

¹⁴⁹ ‘An Comunn Ceilteach’, *DG*, 3 (1907–08), 28.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Edinburgh Celtic Union’, *OT*, 21 Jan 1899.

Eriskay. In 1905, Ella Carmichael wrote to Malcolm MacFarlane that she had ‘got 3 ladies to go separately to the Outer Isles (Eriskay among others) & write down music’.¹⁵¹ Earlier the same year she had arranged for Margaret Burnley Campbell and Winifred Parker to stay on the island, and John Duncan who had first visited Eriskay in 1904, returned during the time Marjory Kennedy-Fraser was there, when there were five in total in their party.¹⁵² It was with regard to this last group that Ella Carmichael wrote candidly to Father Allan that ‘Eadarainn fhein, I am very tired of people who are learning Gaelic as some of those in Eriskay are’.¹⁵³ This comment reveals more than might at first be understood. Eriskay was so busy with Celtic Revival visitors in 1905 that Ella Carmichael, who suffered some form of breakdown in her health in the summer of that year, was reluctant to accept Father Allan’s invitation to seek physical and mental solace there: ‘I want very much to go, but there are too many people in Eriskay just now. It is quite a fashionable suburb!’.¹⁵⁴ As a Gaelic speaker and with her close connections to idealised ‘Celtic’ figures such as Father Allan and indeed her own father, Ella Carmichael was the means by which a number of Celtic Revival enthusiasts were able to experience at first hand the ‘authentic’ culture that inspired their artistic and ideological focus. It was, however, at times a demanding dynamic for her to manage and it is ironic that as a result of the Celtic Revival convergence on Eriskay in 1905 she was deprived of the recuperative solace of ‘St Michaels’,¹⁵⁵ and indeed a final visit with her close confidant, Father Allan, who died a few months later.

Chapter Conclusions

In general, the various clan, kindred and scholarly societies connected to the Gaelic movement were similar to many groups of the period in restricting women’s participation to an auxiliary role in areas that were understood as conventionally female. Therefore, when women achieved positions of influence in An Comunn Gàidhealach, as discussed in the previous two chapters, it was an important example

¹⁵¹ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, 6 Oct 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/11.

¹⁵² Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song* (Kershader: Islands Book Trust, 2011 [1929]), 89.

¹⁵³ Ella C. Carmichael to Father Allan, 7 Aug 1905. Canna House Letters.

¹⁵⁴ Ella C. Carmichael to Father Allan McDonald, 7 Aug 1905. Canna House Letters.

¹⁵⁵ ‘St Michaels’ was the name of the church in Eriskay of which Father Allan was priest. A new church, built under Father Allan’s guidance, was opened in 1903. See Roger Hutchinson, *Father Allan: The Life and Legacy of a Hebridean Priest* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010).

of an alternative and more inclusive structure. Although all the Gaelic-interest scholarly societies, with the exception of the Edinburgh University Celtic Society, were open to women, this did not imply women's equal participation. However, the importance of becoming members of prestigious 'learned' societies was recognised by intellectually or artistically ambitious women in this period, and there were notable women in this category who were life-members of the Gaelic Society of Inverness. The limited opportunities for higher education for women, particularly in a Gaelic context, meant that there were very few women with the intellectual confidence to participate publically on the Gaelic scholarly platform, and Mary MacKellar has possibly not been given enough recognition from this perspective for the pioneering papers she contributed to the same Society. Although Ella Carmichael's protest at the male-only dinners of the Inverness Gaelic Society can be recognised as a stance for gender equality it was also connected with her sense of purpose for Gaelic. In applauding what the Gaelic League was achieving for the language in Ireland she commented that 'sentimentality and vain glorious boasting are not their key-notes, nor is an annual *soirée* or dinner their object',¹⁵⁶ and in her report of Feis Connacht she noted that 'there was very little platform speaking',¹⁵⁷ all of which suggest that she felt that for some Gaelic groups and societies there was more emphasis on speech-making and toasts than on practical efforts for the language. Her Gaelic and feminist bias can therefore be seen as parallel forces in her life.

It was frequently the case in the period that, faced with limited access to groups and societies, women felt that the only way to gain a measure of power and define their own role was to form an all-female alternative, as the Irish example of Inghinidhe na hÉireann illustrates, which although politically motivated, also supported cultural activity. Ella Carmichael, however, did not embrace the separate gender model, but recognised that by creating an entirely new group she could side-step traditional and hierarchical precedents and set modern, gender-inclusive parameters, as well as creating an opportunity to pioneer her own creative responses in support of Gaelic. Thus the Celtic Union offered a social space where Gaelic and Celtic Revival networks could come together providing a sympathetic arena for Ella

¹⁵⁶ E. C. Carmichael, 'Feis Connacht', *Am Bàrd*, (1901), 53–55 (54).

¹⁵⁷ E. C. Carmichael, *Am Bàrd*, (1901), 53.

Carmichael to reproduce or reinterpret ideas that she saw working in Ireland. It is clear she was enthused and inspired by Irish activism, in particular the language focus of the Gaelic League, and not only felt a degree of shared Gaelic identity but appreciated having other women around her who had similar Celtic academic interests. The wider arena of Pan-Celtic activity was also a meeting place for like-minded women in general and offered a supportive network for their artistic and scholarly ambitions.

In challenging the male bias of the Gaelic scholarly societies and the Gaelic movement in general, Ella Carmichael was consequently exposed to potential criticism. Although her irreproachable femininity preserved her from any suggestion of the pejorative ‘unwomanly’ description that was often used to dismiss the modern ‘New Woman’, she was on occasion the object of negative comment on account of her intellectual confidence. This criticism, however, while certainly related to her gender, was also prompted by a degree of opposition to the ‘charmed circle’ of the Carmichaels and underpinned with a suspicion of the Edinburgh middle-class milieu of which they were a part. While some may have seen the Celtic Union’s activity as having too much of an inclusive Celtic rather than an exclusive Gaelic focus, for Ella Carmichael it was a dual perspective which she saw as beneficial for the language through a wider appreciation of Gaelic culture. In the end her loyalty was to the Gaelic cause and her desire was for women to be allowed to participate fully in the Gaelic movement.



Plate 3: Portrait drawing of Ella Carmichael, May 1902. The artist is probably John Butler Yeats, father of W. B. Yeats and the artist Jack Yeats. (For Ella Carmichael in Dublin at this time, see pages 132–133). Frontispiece in Alexander Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, ed. by James Carmichael Watson, III (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1940).



Plate 4: Edinburgh Ladies Gaelic Choir 1907. (*Scots Pictorial*, 12 Oct 1907)



Plate 5: (*Scots Pictorial*, 23 Nov 1907)

5

Women, Gaelic and Literary Matters

Shall I tell you what brings me here! It has so much to do with my Gaelic-ward aims that maybe I ought; [...] I have come to see about taking a room which I can have at a very low rent from my friend Miss Lamont. I shall do my own work altogether, & get all my time through the day for writing.¹

You may object that in all this I have made too much of the importance of material things [...] intellectual freedom depends on material things [...] that's why I have laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own.²

Although just over twenty years separate the two statements quoted above, the Gaelic writer Katherine Whyte Grant's tangible excitement at the prospect of 'a room of [her] own' reflects the gendered reasoning behind Virginia Woolf's assessment that what most women lacked – personal money and privacy – were both necessary for the creative and intellectual space needed to be a writer. For Victorian women who were financially secure, writing offered a degree of intellectual self-fulfilment that kept within conventional bounds of femininity. For most other women, the circumstances of their lives and their gender meant that any literary ambitions had to be fitted around their paid labour for others and the crowded domestic demands of caring for their own or their extended family. Thus both their gender and class influenced the time and opportunities women had to participate in literary activities, and this was also the case in Gaelic literary contexts, as this chapter will discuss.

¹ K. W. Grant to Malcolm MacFarlane, 25 Jan 1908. NLS Acc.9736/14.

² Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Books, 2004 [1929]), 123–125.

In general, there were fewer social barriers to Victorian women's participation in literary activity than there were in many other areas of public life, reflecting an occupation that could be done in private and within the domestic domain. The expansion of the periodical press in the second half of the nineteenth century, propelled by new technology in printing, the abolition of newspaper taxes and paper duty, and improved transport links, greatly increased the potential publication opportunities for aspiring writers.³ In particular this publishing sector was the means by which a number of women were able to make the move from the privacy of personal journals and letter-writing to the printed page. In some cases writing for the periodical press could support their more serious literary endeavours as novelists or poets.⁴

The writer Mary MacKellar's literary works in Gaelic and English, important in their day in encouraging a wider appreciation of Gaelic culture, were first published in the Highland-focused newspapers and periodicals. These publications incorporated a broad spectrum of literary genres, including poetry, reviews, translations, journalistic articles, folklore, song, and a wide range of popular 'recreational reading-matter' on a variety of Highland topics, predominantly in English with some Gaelic content. They also provided an important literary vehicle through which the various Gaelic cultural organisations disseminated information, promoted initiatives and engaged in debate. Reports of cultural activities and meetings were regularly published, and public lectures and speeches were often reproduced in full, while in the letter columns individuals could comment, challenge and criticise, which they did at length and with considerable passion, although this was predominately a male forum. Initially these publications contained very little penned by women, with the exception of Mary MacKellar, but from the early 1890s, contributions by women began to increase, although still remaining a tiny proportion of the total content.⁵ Within the small corpus of female-authored contributions, most

³ The expansion of the popular literary market in Scotland, although with little reference to the Highlands, is discussed in detail by William Donaldson in *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986).

⁴ Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13–14.

⁵ In the *Celtic Magazine*, 12 (1886–87), the only identified female contributions were by Mary MacKellar. Ten years later in the *Celtic Monthly*, 5 (1897), there were at least twelve prose and poetry items in English on Highland themes by four different women of 'Anglo-Highland' background, and one Gaelic contribution by Katherine Whyte Grant.

were written by ‘Anglo-Highland’ women; that is to say women from Highland families, often Highland gentry, who were not Gaelic-speakers, although they sometimes had a limited knowledge of the language. Their writing favoured romantic fictional tales set in the Highlands, non-fiction articles on aspects of Highland history relating to the area with which their own family was connected, as well as poetry on similar themes. In this way the Anglo-Highland women stressed their authentic Highland heritage, although no longer Gaelic-speaking, and they were more likely to be described as ‘Celtic’ rather than ‘Gaelic’ with respect to their work and identity.

The Gaelic world of publishers and editors, like most public domains at this time was male-dominated, and the overwhelming majority of writing on Gaelic and Highland themes in both Gaelic and English, was penned by men. However, if a broader spectrum of literary activity in support of Gaelic culture is considered, including less traditional genres, along with translating and editing activity, women were certainly to be found participating in Gaelic literary contexts. This chapter discusses and assesses the diverse literary contributions of a small number of women across a range of Gaelic literary activities. Their literary work was frequently dependent on the patronage or the advice, encouragement and facilitating support of prominent male scholars or men of influence, and the chapter takes a closer look at these relationships and the loyalties and tensions that underpinned them.

The first section considers the literary work of Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant who were almost exceptional at this time as women writing in Gaelic, and in English from a Gaelic perspective, and across a range of different literary genres. While the literary activity of Mary MacKellar has already been highlighted with regard to her position as Bard to the Gaelic Society of Inverness,⁶ it is the broad scope of her literary endeavours that is discussed here, examining the different contexts in which she found literary opportunities. Although both women had personal ambitions as writers, they also saw their work as contributing to the wider Gaelic cause. The dynamics of balancing that dual purpose with the considerable challenges they faced as single women with little or no independent income is an important thread throughout the discussion.

⁶ See chapter 4, 115.

Gaelic-speaking women writers

The combination of a strong oral culture, the social upheavals of the nineteenth century in the Highlands, and the limited schooling on offer in the Gaelic language, with no provision at all for Gaelic in the Education (Scotland) Act of 1872, served to severely limit not just the number of Gaelic-speakers writing in the language but also the potential readership for literature in Gaelic. At its best, the education system encouraged promising boys to progress to university, and in particular to enter the ministry, while the opportunities on offer for girls were more limited. Although Màiri Mhòr nan Òran composed her songs orally, her lack of literacy in Gaelic meant that while her collected poems and songs were published during her lifetime,⁷ they were written down for her from her own recitation by John Whyte.⁸ It was the case, however, that Màiri Mhòr, in performing her own songs from public platforms, was able to gain a wide audience for her work long before her songs were in print.⁹ Mary MacKellar, on the other hand, born some fourteen years later and from a similarly modest economic background, transferred her voice, also honed in the oral tradition, onto the printed page. Katherine Whyte Grant (1845–1928), also had the opportunity to absorb the rich oral culture of the ceilidh-house¹⁰ that was still functioning in the Argyllshire community where she grew up, but as the daughter of a school-master and lay-preacher, she also had the educational advantage of a scholarly home with access to books. Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant both had literary ambitions although neither was in a financial position to be able to devote their time fully to writing. The Gaelic dimension of their literary endeavours is examined here, and related to this, their interaction with networks of influence and support within the Gaelic movement.

⁷ Màiri Nic-a' Phearsain, *Dain agus Orain Ghaidhlig* (Inverness: A. & U. Mac-Coinnich, 1891).

⁸ Alastair Mac-Bheathain, 'Life of Mrs Mary MacPherson, The Skye Poetess', in *Dain agus Orain*, xi-xiv (xiii). It is thought that Màiri Mhòr could read her own poetry in print, but possibly in the same way that many Gaelic-speakers could read the Gaelic Bible simply because they had an intimate knowledge of the text. Donald Meek suggests that she may have learnt to read and write when she moved to Glasgow to train as a nurse. See *Màiri Mhòr Nan Òran*, ed. by Dòmhnall Eachann Meek, (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1998), 28.

⁹ Màiri Mhòr's importance and particular significance as a woman articulating the socio-political voice of the Gaelic-speaking populace will be discussed in chapter 7.

¹⁰ See Ronald Black, ed., *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), xii–xiv.

Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant were from Lochaber and Appin respectively, and their writing frequently drew on the oral traditions of these two geographical areas. Both women married at a young age. Katherine Whyte Grant was widowed and experienced the death of her only child within three years of marriage.¹¹ Mary MacKellar struggled in a marriage that was blighted by economic hardship,¹² and she eventually successfully pursued legal action for separation, not an easy or socially acceptable option for a woman, and especially difficult for someone in her economic circumstances.¹³ Thus both women were similarly positioned in having to support themselves financially as single women. This was a particular challenge for Mary MacKellar as the *Highland Monthly* made reference to at the time of her death, stating that ‘she earned her living by pen and household work; and, though she bravely kept the wolf of poverty at bay, yet it was no easy task’.¹⁴ Despite the economic uncertainties they faced, both women travelled extensively. Mary MacKellar, in what must have been uncomfortable and frequently dangerous conditions, sailed with her husband in his small trading vessel around the Baltic ports, including St Petersburg, and she was also in Canada.¹⁵ Katherine Whyte Grant spent three years working for a wealthy family in Bucharest in the 1870s, and from 1899 to 1907 she lived in South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia,¹⁶ and later in her life she travelled to Norway.

Mary MacKellar

An obituary for Mary MacKellar recorded that her ‘command of the Gaelic tongue was excellent; she wrote it with force, accuracy, and clearness’, adding that ‘her English vocabulary was cultured and chaste both in writing and conversation beyond that of many who could boast of much better advantages’.¹⁷ This level of literacy in both Gaelic and English was unusual for a Gaelic-speaking woman of her

¹¹ ‘A Gaelic Kinderspiel’, *People’s Journal*, 14 Sept 1907.

¹² ‘Mary MacKellar: The Lochaber Bard’, *Scots Magazine*, 7 (1890–91), 451–463.

¹³ ‘Outer House: MacKellar v. MacKellar’, *Inverness Advertiser*, 30 Sept 1880; and 3 Dec 1880.

¹⁴ ‘Mary MacKellar, Bard and Seanachie’, *Highland Monthly*, 2 (1890–91), 434–440 (436).

¹⁵ A poem by ‘Màiri Nic Eallair, Hanobher, Aug 19, 1871’ was reprinted in the *Inverness Courier* (8 Feb 1872) from the *Canada Scotsman*. Hanover, Canada West, (now Ontario) is situated between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron.

¹⁶ She had siblings living in each of the three countries: Rev Charles Whyte, Sydney; Mr D. M. Whyte, South Africa; and two sisters, Mrs Morrison and Mrs Steele in New Zealand. See ‘The Late Mrs K. W. Grant, Oban’, *OT*, 25 Aug 1928.

¹⁷ ‘Mary MacKellar, Bard and Seanachie’, *Highland Monthly*, 2 (1890–91), 434–440 (437).

class who was brought up in the rural Gàidhealtachd in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was said that ‘her education was all her own doing’,¹⁸ but she may have benefited from one of the church schools that were in operation at the time, schools that put strong emphasis on literacy in English but also gave some place to the teaching of Gaelic, if only to encourage the reading of the Gaelic Bible. However, her own effort and commitment to improving her education should not be underestimated, particularly as her personal circumstances were not conducive to providing the time or the resources to assist her in this aim.

Mary MacKellar’s literary output in poetry and prose was published regularly in Highland periodicals and newspapers over a period from the early 1870s up to her untimely death in 1890. Some reviews of her work at the time of her death make reference, with some justification, to her ‘backward look’ and a constant recall of the ‘heroic past of the Highland Gael’, and as a result, her lack of comment on the contemporary situation in the Highlands, and on the land question in particular.¹⁹ She did in fact write on the subject, on one occasion at least, in ‘A Lay Sermon – “How Much is a Man better than a Sheep”’,²⁰ where she concluded that: ‘Freewill emigration to better their condition and give better prospects to their families – that is laudable, but insomuch as men are better than sheep, we object to their being turned like dumb driven cattle out of the land of their forefathers by the arbitrary will of any interested individual or by oppressive measures’. Possibly Mary MacKellar had seen evidence of the ‘better prospects’ that some Highland people had managed to create for themselves when she was in Ontario in 1871. However, although the Gaelic journalist John Whyte described her as ‘politically somewhat conservative’ and ‘deeply imbued with a spirit of admiration for the chiefs and chieftains of her native north’²¹ (a position shared by many others in Gaelic circles at the time), he also referred to her as being deeply interested in the cause of the Highland people and an ‘active sympathiser’ with ‘all that related to their advancement and the proper recognition to their language and their legitimate aspirations’.²² It is clear, however,

¹⁸ ‘Mary MacKellar, Bard and Seanachie’, 436.

¹⁹ ‘Mary MacKellar, Bard and Seanachie’, *Highland Monthly*, 437; ‘Death of Mrs Mary MacKellar’, *Scottish Highlander*, 11 Sept 1890, 5; ‘Mary MacKellar – The Lochaber Bard’, *Scots Magazine*, (1890–91), 451–463 (462).

²⁰ Mary MacKellar, *Scottish Highlander*, 9 Feb 1888.

²¹ ‘Funeral of Mary MacKellar’, *OT*, 20 Sept 1890.

²² ‘Funeral of Mary MacKellar’, *OT*, 20 Sept 1890.

that Mary MacKellar's main interest with regard to her writing lay in Gaelic history and tradition and she was acutely aware that much of this distinctive cultural knowledge was disappearing with the decline of the oral tradition:

The 'Céilidh' has now vanished into a thing of the past and the songs so full of profound wisdom and high teaching have been frowned upon as sinful; and therefore the young of the present day, with all their knowledge of the three R's, are less educated than their ancestors were. [W]e hope that amidst this modern revival of Celticism, our Gaelic bards will meet with renewed appreciation.²³

While her Gaelic verse followed traditional Gaelic patterns in form, imagery and subject-matter,²⁴ in her prose narratives, written for the most part in English, Mary MacKellar developed a form of cultural essay in which she incorporated and contextualised different aspects of Gaelic oral tradition, including song, proverb, folklore and information on material culture. Her papers for the Gaelic Society of Inverness were very much in this style and, as already discussed,²⁵ they provide a window on particular female domains, especially valuable today for their mainland provenance.²⁶ Her articles in the *Celtic Magazine* also follow this pattern, synthesising oral tradition and song, history and legend into an accessible literary form. To a degree, therefore, Mary MacKellar was extending onto the printed page a female responsibility for preserving and imparting oral tradition. This format was adapted and developed in the tourist guide-book she compiled for the districts of Fort William, Glen Coe and Lochaber, first published in 1881, in which she presents an extended cultural essay of place.²⁷ Drawing on her detailed Gaelic knowledge of the history and traditional lore of the district, she was able to provide the visitor with a

²³ 'Mrs Mary MacKellar, 'The Bardess of Clan Cameron', in *Modern Gaelic Bards (Second Series)*, ed. by Malcolm C. MacLeod, (Dundee: John Leng; Glasgow: Alex. MacLaren, 1913), 58–93 (58–59).

²⁴ See Mary MacKellar, *Gaelic and English Poems* (Inverness: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1880). Also *Modern Gaelic Bards*, 58–93. Her Gaelic verse is worthy of closer attention than it has been given to date, and to an extent may have suffered from the impression given by her poems in English which, without the strictures of her Gaelic craft, are full of Victorian sentimentalism and the imagery of the 'Kailyard'.

²⁵ See chapter 4, 117.

²⁶ 'The Waulking Day', *TGSI*, 13 (1886–87), 201–217; 'The Sheiling: its traditions and songs: Part 1', *TGSI*, 14 (1887–88), 135–153; 'The Sheiling: its traditions and songs: Part 2', *TGSI*, 15 (1888–89), 151–171.

²⁷ Mary MacKellar, *Historical & Traditional Guide to Fort William, Glencoe and Lochaber* (Fort William: Alexander MacDougall, 1881 [1890]).

personal and informed description of the area and from a Gaelic perspective.²⁸ The tourist industry was just developing in the Highlands at this time, encouraged by greatly improved and improving transport links, and the book was one of a number of similar guides covering different geographical areas published in response to this market.²⁹ Other guide-books for the Highlands at the time were more likely to be compiled by those who were in fact visitors themselves and were quite evidently ‘non-Gaelic’ in authorship, containing scarcely a mention of the Gaelic language at all.³⁰ Mary MacKellar, in contrast, could offer an ‘insider’ and Gaelic-informed perspective to the guide-book genre, giving the place-names of the area in Gaelic and explaining their origin in relation to local topography and traditional lore, as well as interpreting the area through Gaelic-referenced historical and literary examples, interspersed with the requisite practical information:

Guides can be had for Ben Nevis either at Fort William or Banavie and no stranger should attempt the ascent without one. They charge very reasonable rates, and in general are very obliging. Ponies, if wished for, can be taken the length of the tarn, which makes the ascent less toilsome. [The] lower terrace or shoulder is called “The hill for sitting,” “Meall an t-suidhe,” probably because it has always been the resting-place on the way to the Ben proper.³¹

She also recognised opportunities to promote the ‘cultured Gael’, pointing out, for example, that the Gaelic scholar-poets, Ewen MacLachlan and James Munro, were buried in the historical Craigs Burial-Ground in the centre of Fort William:

An obelisk commemorates Ewen MacLachlan, a distinguished linguist, Celtic scholar, and poet. He translated the Iliad from Greek into Gaelic.

²⁸ The sense of the cultural connections between oral tradition and place that was strongly reflected in the work of Gaelic-speaking women who collected Gaelic song and folklore, including Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant is discussed further in chapter 6. For a useful commentary on the subject of a sense of place in a Gaelic cultural context see Michael Newton, *Warriors of the Word* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009), 296–308. His reference to a ‘detailed topographic datastore’ seems particularly relevant to Mary MacKellar’s ‘thick description’ of her home district.

²⁹ See, for example, *Benjie’s Guide to the Athole Highlands* (Edinburgh: Duncan Macara, 1882); *A Week at Oban: A Hand-book for the Tourist and Visitor* (Edinburgh: Thos. Gray, 1882); Henry Dunn Smith, *Routes and Circular Tours: Glasgow to Inveraray* (Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London: J. Menzies & Co, 1882); *The Tourist’s Guide to Islay* (Glasgow: Wilson & McCormick, 1881). The Callander to Oban Railway was completed in the summer of 1880, reaching Fort William in 1894.

³⁰ To give one example of the non-Gaelic perspective: a writer refers to ‘Colonsay Beg, otherwise the lesser Colonsay’, remarking ‘strange that in Gaelic *beg* should mean little’. *Out From Oban: A Series of Excursion Sketches* (Edinburgh: Thos. Gray, 1882), 83.

³¹ MacKellar, *Guide*, 30–31.

[...] Here also lies at rest James Munro, one of the best Gaelic scholars that ever lived. He was for many years Parliamentary school-master at Kilmonivaig, and was author of a Gaelic Grammar and of a volume of poems and songs'.³²

In bringing her knowledge of Gaelic and traditional lore to the task of compiling an area guide-book, Mary MacKellar was able to provide the visitor with a sense of the layers of Gaelic culture embedded in the landscape, and in that way to highlight the importance of the language. In addition to the *Tourist Guide*, and published around the same time,³³ she also compiled a pocket-sized Gaelic phrase-book aimed at the English-speaking visitor to the Highlands. The phrases and vocabulary chosen, given in Gaelic, with phonetics and English translation, offer a vignette on the Victorian tourist to the Highlands. Clearly of middle or upper-class background and having an expectation of enjoying fishing and shooting in season, they might also explore the scenic beauty of the area on pony, under sail and on foot. The phrases also reveal that the iconic visitor attractions were much the same as today: Ben Nevis and Ben Cruachan, a sail up Loch Etive, trips through Glen Coe and to the Isle of Iona, and a visit to the Highland capital of Inverness. While the phrase-book was aimed at helping the English-speaking tourists to communicate their practical needs to the local Gaelic-speaking population, it may also have been used by learners of the language at a time when there was very little literature catering for this sector. In fact Mary MacKellar's phrase-book was in print well into the twentieth century, revised and added to by Rev. Malcolm MacLennan in 1929, undergoing another update at the hand of Alexander MacFarlane³⁴ in 1939, with a reprint in 1949. In these re-shapings, the booklet was clearly seen as a phrase-book for learners of Gaelic, and marginalia in one copy in NLS provides evidence that it was indeed used for this purpose. Both of the publications discussed above were responding to a new literary market prompted by the expanding tourist industry in the Highlands. Mary MacKellar, with her bilingual capabilities and culturally rooted sense of place, was

³² MacKellar, *Guide*, 17–18.

³³ Mary MacKellar, *The Tourist Hand-Book of Gaelic and English Phrases for the Highlands* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, [no date]). 1882 is the estimated publication date given in the *Scottish Gaelic Union Catalogue*.

³⁴ Alexander MacFarlane, *Handbook of Gaelic Phrases and Sentences with pronunciations and English equivalents based on "The Tourist's Handbook"* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1939 & 1949).

well-positioned to offer a broader Gaelic-informed perspective to those who came to ‘view the scenery’ of Lochaber.

Mary MacKellar published very little prose in Gaelic. This possibly reflected the market-orientated editorial policy of the Highland periodicals and press, where Gaelic content was for the most part limited to poetry and song.³⁵ It was not, however, that she lacked the linguistic skill, as was shown by the positive reviews she received for her Gaelic translation of the second volume of Queen Victoria’s Highland Diary, published in 1886.³⁶ Indeed, this was a task for which she had to prove her literary competence in Gaelic by submitting a sample twenty pages to the scrutiny of John Francis Campbell of Islay, who, as it was reported ‘gave his opinion of the translation in the most favourable of terms with the result that the poetess has been entrusted with the delicate and difficult task’.³⁷ The first volume of the Queen’s Highland Diary (1848–61) had also been translated into Gaelic³⁸ but not, according to some, with any accomplishment,³⁹ and hence the extra precautions taken to ensure a competent translation of the second volume. This was a prestigious literary commission. The goodwill of Queen Victoria towards the Gaelic language, confirmed by her contribution of two hundred pounds towards the fund to establish a Celtic Chair at Edinburgh University, was a source of pride for many Gaels and permission being granted to translate the Highland diaries into Gaelic was a further public sign of royal approval for the language. As has already been noted, the marriage of Queen Victoria’s daughter to the Marquis of Lorne was understood as connecting the monarch directly with the Gaelic people – ‘Louisa, ban-phrionnsa nan Gàidheal’ as Calum Campbell MacPhail addressed the princess in the poem he wrote

³⁵ This was a situation influenced by economics and the fact that the potential readership for Gaelic literature was very small. As Ruairidh Erskine of Marr, who had plenty of experience of the financial challenge of sustaining Gaelic periodicals, commented: ‘The great difficulty is circulation, so few Gaels – alas! – can read their own language. [...] Another 10 years of work in the schools is needed before public can be got together sufficient to support a Gaelic paper’. Ruairidh Erskine of Marr to Malcolm MacFarlane, c1908–09. NLS Acc. 9736/135.

³⁶ *Tuilleadh Dhuilleag bho m’ leabhar-latha mu chunntas mo bheatha anns a’ Ghaidhealtachd bho 1862 gu 1882* (Duneideann ’us Lunnainn: Uilleam Blackwood, 1886).

³⁷ ‘The Queen’s New Book in Gaelic’, *Celtic Magazine*, 9 (1883–84), 434.

³⁸ Translated by Rev. John Patrick St Clair and published in 1878. A slightly earlier translation (1872) by Angus MacPherson was never published. The reason for this appears to have been that the proofs were given to Rev. Alexander Cameron to revise and his marginal corrections were ‘almost innumerable’, to the extent that the project was abandoned. The annotated proofs are in Glasgow University Library MS Gen 1709/50. See William Grant, ‘Alexander Cameron and *Reliquiae Celticae*’ in Byrne, Clancy & Kidd, *Litreachas & Eachdraidh*, 200–213 (209).

³⁹ See ‘The Queen’s New Book in Gaelic’, *Celtic Magazine*, 9 (1883–84), 434, referring to ‘the mess made of the work by the translator of the previous volume’.

to commemorate the event.⁴⁰ Mary MacKellar also wrote a poem to mark the marriage⁴¹ and, in addition, in May 1884 she composed a lament on the death of the Duke of Albany, sending a personal copy to the Queen.⁴² This patriotic gesture may have commended her as a potential translator of the Highland Diaries,⁴³ and thus to claim no little personal distinction for herself. It is, however, clear that she saw the translation as honouring the Gaels, the Gàidhealtachd and the Gaelic language:

'Us tha mac-talla ri iolach éibhneis
 Air feadh nan sléibhtean 's nam beanntan cian'
 'Us clann nan Gàidheal mar dhaoine ìotmhor
 A gheabhadh fìor-uisge mar am miann.
 'S do mholadh binn orra fhéin 's an tìr
 A bhi air a sgriobhadh an cainnt nam Fiann
 Is bidh a' Ghàidhlig a nis 'am pris
 Ged a theirteadh uimp' gu'n do laidh a grian.⁴⁴

A review of Mary MacKellar's translation of the 'Queen's Book' noted with candour that the task of translating it was not an easy one given that the literary style of the original was 'dry', adding that 'in some parts of the book we are safe in saying that the work has gained in the translation'.⁴⁵ Although it was certainly an honour for Mary MacKellar to be entrusted with such a prestigious project, as someone for whom '[t]he struggle of life was a very real and a very earnest one',⁴⁶ she had more pressing practical needs. The payment for the translation, described as 'a paltry fifty

⁴⁰ 'Louisa, Princess of the Gaels': see Calum Campbell MacPhail, 'Fàilte air Mac Ceann-feadhna Earra-Ghàidheal is air Ban-phrionnsa Louise', in *Caran an t-Saoghail*, ed. by Donald E. Meek (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), 188–192 (192).

⁴¹ Mairi NicEalair, 'Fàilte Do Mharcus Latharna's Do Mhnaoi Oig Rioghail' (Welcome to the Marquis of Lorne and His Royal Young Bride), *Inverness Courier*, 8 Feb 1872; Also in: MacKellar, *Gaelic and English Poems*, 45–48, with an English translation by Sheriff Nicolson.

⁴² Prince Leopold George Duncan Albert, fourth son of Queen Victoria, died of haemophilia at the age of thirty. See Mairi Nic-Ealair, 'Tuireadh airson Prionnsa Donnachadh Diuc Albani', *Celtic Magazine*, 9 (1883–84), 335–336.

⁴³ Sir Theodore Martin (1816–1909), a Scottish writer, whose biography *A Life of the Prince Consort* won him the lifelong friendship of Queen Victoria, commissioned the translation from Mary MacKellar. See 'The Queen's New Book in Gaelic', *Celtic Magazine*, 9 (1883–84), 434.

⁴⁴ MacKellar, 'Òran do Bhan-rìgh Victoria, air dhomh an Leabhair aig a Mòrachd Rìoghail a Léughadh', *Gaelic and English Poems*, 1880. This poem must refer to the Gaelic translation of the first volume of the Queen's Highland Diary – see note 37 above.

⁴⁵ 'Gaelic Translation of the Queen's Book', *Celtic Magazine*, 11 (1885–86), 568–571 (568).

⁴⁶ 'Death of Mary MacKellar', *OT*, 13 September 1890.

pounds' for two years' work',⁴⁷ was comparable to what a middle-ranking housemaid would earn at the time,⁴⁸ and while not a great recompense for her efforts, was probably a welcome assured income.

Among a number of laments written in Gaelic and English for Mary MacKellar on her death in 1890, there was one by her sister 'bana-bhàrd', Màiri Mhòr nan Òran.⁴⁹ It is not clear whether this poetical gesture points to an unrecorded friendship or represents a professional duty, a respectful acknowledgement of a sister poet and fellow-worker in the Gaelic cause. Despite the fact that both women were prominently active in Gaelic circles during the previous two decades, and indeed were conspicuous as women in a cultural arena that was dominated by men, there is little evidence to suggest that their lives converged socially to any great extent.⁵⁰ What is clear is that while Màiri Mhòr is given her rightful place in Gaelic history, her life and work highlighted in book, film and public commemoration, Mary MacKellar has to a degree slipped into the shadows and the significance of her contribution to Gaelic in her day has not been fully appreciated. The probable reason for this was remarked upon with some prescience in an obituary for the Lochaber bard in which it was noted that she did not 'give voice to the aspirations of the Highlanders of her own time, a fact which makes it very doubtful if her productions will very long outlive herself'.⁵¹ In similar vein, another obituary reflected that: 'She dearly loved the heroic past of the Highland Gael – Clan history, legend, custom, and even superstition. [...] Mrs MacKellar was no politician. [...] She seemed indifferent to that other aspect of [Highland life] which looks [...] on "three acres and a cow" as the ultimate and ideal goal of rural life'.⁵² However, as was the case with many of

⁴⁷ 'Mary MacKellar, Poetess and Novelist', *Celtic Monthly*, 1 (1893), 117–118 (117).

⁴⁸ The average annual wage of a Housemaid in 1890 was £21–£25, although this would include food and board.

<<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/victorianbritain/divided/source6.htm>> [Accessed 23 Jne 2013]

⁴⁹ Màiri Nighean Ian Bhàin, 'Cumha do Mhàiri Chamshron, Bana-Bhàrd nan Camshronach', *Scottish Highlander*, 30 Oct 1890.

⁵⁰ The subject is an interesting one and worthy of further research. They both experienced dark times in their personal lives and found a degree of solace and strength in their native landscape, and both drew on an intimate knowledge of the oral tradition. There was also overlap in the people and subject-matter they addressed in their poetry. In addition, Professor Blackie was a patron of both women.

⁵¹ 'Death of Mrs Mary MacKellar', *Scottish Highlander*, 11 Sept 1890. This was probably written by John Murdoch who was a good friend of Mary MacKellar, the two having more in common than this one area of potential division. See Annie MacKay, 'Mary MacKellar, Poetess and Novelist', *Celtic Monthly*, 1 (1893), 117–118.

⁵² 'Mary MacKellar', *Highland Monthly*, 2 (1890–91), 437.

the Gaelic poets of the nineteenth century, it was not that Mary MacKellar did not notice the empty glens and the loss of community – ‘Today there is scarcely a human voice to be heard [...] It is a beautiful country, and one grudges it to the deer and the sheep’⁵³ – but rather that she did not associate this with earlier clearance by clan chiefs. Although John Whyte’s comment that Mary [Cameron] MacKellar was ‘deeply imbued with a spirit of admiration for the chiefs and chieftains of her native north’⁵⁴ was generally correct, the more specific assessment that ‘Lochaber and Clan Cameron formed the centre and soul of the poetess’ life and work’⁵⁵ is more significant. This dual loyalty needs to be understood in relation to a complex and deeply felt Gaelic connection between ancestral land and belonging, an understanding of place encoded in the Gaelic term ‘Dùthchas’.⁵⁶ The same intuition underpinned Màiri Mhòr’s relationship with her native island, as will be discussed in chapter 7, and was a strong influence behind her socio-political voice which, although she too had her inconsistencies,⁵⁷ was more attuned to the immediate moment than that of Mary MacKellar. However, in the diversity of her Gaelic literary efforts, and particularly in her use of Gaelic in new literary contexts, Mary MacKellar was increasing the visibility and stressing the importance of the language to a wider public.

Katherine Whyte Grant

An emphasis on place and regional distinctiveness in relation to tradition and lore is also a theme in the literary work of Katherine Whyte Grant, her perspective sharpened and influenced by her reading of other literatures, especially the German and English romantic poets, and her experience of cultural diversity gained through travel. An article published in 1911 referred to Katherine Whyte Grant’s literary endeavours as ‘pioneer work’, mentioning in particular her Gaelic translation of Friedrich Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell* from the original German; a Gaelic ‘kinderspiel’, a

⁵³ Mary MacKellar, ‘A Basket of Fragments’, *OT*, 11 Jan 1890.

⁵⁴ Quoting ‘I.O.B.’ in the *OT*, 20 Sept 1890.

⁵⁵ ‘Mary MacKellar’, *Highland Monthly*, 2 (1890–91), 434.

⁵⁶ See John MacInnes, ‘The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry’ in *Dùthchas Nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes*, ed. by Michael Newton (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 278–279; Newton, *Warriors of the Word*, 306–308; Dòmhnall E. Meek, ‘“Nuair Chuimhnicheam an Cuilithionn”: Àite Samhlachail na Tìre is Cruth na Tìre ann am Bàrdachd Ghàidhlig na Naoidheamh Linn Deug’ in *Cruth na Tìre*, ed. by Wilson McLeod and Máire Ní Annracháin (Dublin: Coiscéim, 2003), 1–38.

⁵⁷ See Dòmhnall Eachann Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Òran*, 40.

play with songs based on the story of the sleeping Fenians; and *Aig Tigh na Beinne*, described as ‘a new departure [...] being Highland life from a woman’s point of view’.⁵⁸ Katherine Whyte Grant benefited from growing up in a household where she had access to books and in a district where the oral tradition was still active, and both of these strands fed into her writing. It was an upbringing where education was not limited to the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic but ‘natural history, geology and astronomy were made wonderful and delightful by [her father]’.⁵⁹ Her mother also encouraged her intellectual interests, and her grandmother and others of an older generation brought to her attention the stories and the lore of the ceilidh-house.⁶⁰ The third discernible influence in her literary work was her interest in the literature, languages and cultures of other races and nations and which played an important part in her stance in support of Gaelic.

Despite the personal tragedy of the death of her husband and only child, and a subsequent illness, possibly connected to this experience, that thwarted her attempt to gain a teaching qualification from the Normal School in Glasgow, Katherine Whyte Grant was clearly motivated to make the most of her life in whatever way she could. In preparation for a position in Europe as a lady’s companion, she undertook self-study in German and French, and spent three years in Bucharest from 1875–77, where she had the opportunity to travel in the summer to different parts of central Europe.⁶¹ This experience opened her eyes to other small nation cultures in which she recognised parallels and similarities to Gaelic tradition in their folk-tales and social customs,⁶² and alerted her to the importance of linguistic and dialectal diversity in maintaining such cultural heterogeneity. Movements for cultural revival and independence in the nineteenth century promoted folklore and folktales, as well as native language and traditions, as sources and symbols of national identity, and artists and writers in revival movements often drew on this source in their work.⁶³ In a similar way, although with a cultural rather than an overtly political motive, Gaelic

⁵⁸ ‘A Noted Celtic Authoress’, *OT*, 21 Oct 1911.

⁵⁹ ‘A Noted Celtic Authoress’, *OT*, 21 Oct 1911.

⁶⁰ ‘The Late K. W. Grant: A Noted Gaelic Scholar’, *OT*, 25 Aug 1928.

⁶¹ ‘Mrs Kate Whyte Grant’, *People’s Journal*, 14 Dec 1907.

⁶² For a specific example of Katherine Whyte Grant’s interest in cross-cultural myths, see chapter 6, 165.

⁶³ See: John Neubauer, ‘General Introduction’ in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Dis-junctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, 4 vols (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), III, 1–39.

tales and lore from the oral tradition became an important influence and inspiration in the writing of Katherine Whyte Grant.

Accessing opportunities to have literary work published was a major challenge to any writer without financial means. The issue was even more challenging for a Gaelic writer, and particularly difficult for women, not just with regard to money, but also involving, as it did, negotiating the male hegemony of editors and publishers. In this respect, Malcolm MacFarlane, with his Gaelic literary experience and contacts, was an important mentor for Katherine Whyte Grant, and they corresponded regularly over a number of years,⁶⁴ starting from when the latter was living in Sydney, between 1905 and 1907:

I see from this week's Oban Times that you are over the Publications Com. of the Comunn Gàidhealach, and that you are preparing reading books for future use in schools. I wonder whether I might venture to consult you, – as one who has the benefit of the cause as deeply at heart as yourself?⁶⁵

Her letters discuss her literary ideas in detail, looking to MacFarlane for encouragement, direction and constructive advice, although not always agreeing with his view, and they provide an insight into the hopes for Gaelic that underpinned her literary ambitions. The correspondence also throws light on a collaborative project stemming from their shared vision to provide Gaelic literature for young readers. Katherine Whyte Grant had a particular interest in writing for children and young people, recognising the need for such literature to encourage a new generation of literate Gaelic speakers. Malcolm MacFarlane similarly recognised and indeed addressed the lack of Gaelic reading material for schools,⁶⁶ and this shared interest was frequently a subject of their epistolary discussions. In a letter from Sydney in 1905, Katherine Whyte Grant wrote: 'My thoughts have been much in the same groove as your own with regard to creating a literature for children and young

⁶⁴ Katherine Whyte Grant's side of the correspondence is preserved amongst Malcolm MacFarlane's papers now held in NLS Acc.9736. The two may have been introduced by the Gaelic journalist and writer, Henry Whyte, a first cousin of K. W. Grant, and close friend and regular correspondent of MacFarlane. However, given MacFarlane's early upbringing in Dalavich and K. W. Grant's Appin roots, the two may have known each other through shared Argyllshire connections.

⁶⁵ K. W. Grant to Malcolm MacFarlane, 1 March 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/129.

⁶⁶ MacFarlane's first attempt to address this need was *An Treòraiche: Leabhran Sgoil air son Na Cloinne* (Stirling: Aonghas Mac Aoidh, 1903).

people',⁶⁷ and listed a varied corpus of short stories, tales and rhymes that she had in mind for a Gaelic reading-book, including Gaelic translations from other literary traditions.⁶⁸ The letter also hints indirectly at MacFarlane taking on the editing of such a book and presumably finding a route towards its publication:

When all is arranged and the fair copy written, shall I send it to you, or is there any other who is equally fit to oversee the work should you be too busy? If you could do it, it would be done sympathetically. [...] The reason why I ask [...] is that you, having a clear idea of what is needed and such an earnest desire to advance the cause [,] are the proper one to judge of the suitability of the articles. Not that I would impose upon you.⁶⁹

The reference to 'the cause', and in another part of the letter to 'our common aim', confirms that she saw her work as part of a commitment to a broader Gaelic ideal. The reading-book did not materialize as planned but *Aig Tigh Na Beinne*, published in 1911, contains much of what she discussed with MacFarlane in her letters from Australia.⁷⁰

In response to another project, this time proposed by MacFarlane, Katherine Whyte Grant wrote:

As to a Kinderspiel, I can say nothing, never having looked into such a thing. What is it? The word implies a drama played by children. Your remarks on there being plenty songs for the purpose implies an opera for children. I will make enquiry, and see about it. I suspect I should require a little coaching on the subject.⁷¹

It was well over a year and a half later in January 1907 that the draft Kinderspiel, *Dùsgadh na Féinne*, materialised and it was published at the end of the same year,⁷² by which time Katherine Whyte Grant had returned to Scotland, and was living with her sister in Glasgow.⁷³ In marketing her work, the support of someone like Malcolm

⁶⁷ K. W. G., Sydney, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 19 May 1905. NLS Acc. 9736/130.

⁶⁸ Examples of the latter category are her translations of 'The Buckwheat' by Hans Christian Andersen, and 'Wynkin, Blynkin, and Nod', a popular nineteenth century lullaby, given in Gaelic as 'Caogan, Plaosgan, is Suain'.

⁶⁹ Grant to MacFarlane, 19 May 1905. NLS Acc.9736/130.

⁷⁰ K. W. G., *Aig Tigh Na Beinne* (Oban: Hugh MacDonald; Glasgow: Alex McLaren, 1911).

⁷¹ Grant to MacFarlane, 19 May 1905. NLS Acc.9736/130.

⁷² *Dùsgadh na Féinne* (Paisley: J. & R. Parlane, 1908).

⁷³ This was intimated in a letter to MacFarlane in April 1907: 'I hope to arrive in London about July 10 [1907]. NLS Acc. 9736 / 43.

MacFarlane was invaluable, as he had access to a network of contacts in the Highland and Gaelic press. Thus the *People's Journal*, edited by Malcolm C. Macleod, described the Kinderspiel as 'happily conceived and admirably accomplished', commenting that 'the Gaelic is presented with accuracy and thoroughness – a most desirable quality – and also affords a comparison of the idioms of different districts'.⁷⁴ John MacKay gave publicity to the work in the *Celtic Monthly*, while the editor of *Guth na Bliadhna*, Ruairidh Erskine of Marr, focused his supportive comments on an aspect of the Kinderspiel that agreed with his own editorial sympathies:

In this little play, Mrs Whyte Grant has used the ground work of the well-known legend touching the sleeping Fenians wherewith to clothe her sensible and patriotic ideas on nationality and language, and by the same, to erect a symbol for the young – to teach a much-needed lesson.⁷⁵

While Erskine may well have chosen his emphasis according to his personal nationalist agenda, the Foreword to the Kinderspiel suggests some accordance with this view:

Chuir mi air leth-taobh an seòrsa tha coitcheann 'sa Bheurla agus chuir mi ri chéile mar a b'fhèarr a dh'fhaotainn na rannan beaga a b'abhàist duinn a radh ri chéile an uair a bhiodhmaid a' cluich air a' bhruthach, agus sean sgeulachdan Ghaidhealach a tha taitneach innte féin agus bu chòir gràdh a mhosgladh d'ar Dùthaich ar Cànanain 's ar Ceòl.⁷⁶

There is certainly a degree of Gaelic national rhetoric in this statement: a desire to distance the work from similar examples in English, and an emphasis on love of place, language and culture. Children's literature was often used in movements for cultural and national revival as a vehicle for transmitting patriotic ideals and ideology to young people, emphasizing important aspects of cultural difference, historical markers, and symbols of identity and belonging.⁷⁷ Similar ideological

⁷⁴ 'A Gaelic Kinderspiel', *People's Journal*, 14 Dec 1907.

⁷⁵ *GB*, 5 (1908), 83.

⁷⁶ 'A Gaelic Kinderspiel', *People's Journal*, 14 Dec 1907.

⁷⁷ For discussion on the subject in the context of Ireland at the time of the national revival (1880–1920), see Máire West, 'Kings, Heroes and Warriors: Aspects of Children's Literature in Ireland in the Era of Emergent Nationalism', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 76 (1994), 165–

motives underpinned Katherine Whyte Grant's vision of attractive and inexpensive Gaelic books for younger children as is apparent in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane:

Why not get up a few thoroughly good bairns' picture books. Look what a power they would have in the right direction over the children. If the grown people are so slow to move, let us turn to the children. Let us get something so bonnie to the eye and so tempting to the child mind that they couldn't help liking them. The parents will give a 6d without grudging, if it be for the little folks. Let us win the children.⁷⁸

Despite an emphasis put on the duty of mothers in the home environment in instructing their children in Gaelic, there was little attention given to literature that might assist them in the task. At the Educational Conference held under the auspices of An Comunn Gàidhealach in 1908, a speaker drew attention to the fact that there was a 'super-abundance' of folk-lore and fairy-tales that would appeal to the imagination of the Gaelic child, suggesting these should be used in bi-lingual primers with Gaelic on one page and a translation in English on the other.⁷⁹ However, although An Comunn agitated in support of Gaelic education and backed the publication of Gaelic grammar books and basic readers for schools and for adult learners, the need for informal Gaelic picture and early-reading books for younger children was not given any practical consideration or priority. Katherine Whyte Grant approached the organisation in February of 1908 seeking 'patronage' to publish 'Children's Story Books', but nothing was forthcoming.⁸⁰ In 1914, she was still trying to find a way round the obstacle of lack of finance for her literary projects for children, writing to MacFarlane at that time: 'For many years I have coveted to publish a gay picture Alphabet for the little folk; more for the house than school'.⁸¹ The letter explains that having sent the manuscript along with illustrations to An Comunn, the response was that they 'could not venture to incur the expense till the set of graduated School books was published'. There is a sense of resigned defeat in her rhetorical question to MacFarlane: 'Is such a tiny work too insignificant for your

84. Also Ríona Nic Congáil, "'Fiction, Amusement, Instruction': The Irish Fireside Club and the Educational Ideology of the Gaelic League', *Éire-Ireland*, 44:1 (2009), 91–117.

⁷⁸ K. W. Grant, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 27 Nov 1907. NLS Acc.9736/48.

⁷⁹ 'An Comunn Gaidhealach Educational Conference', *OWN*, 11 July 1908.

⁸⁰ K. W. Grant, Glasgow to Malcolm MacFarlane, 27 Feb 1908. NLS Acc.9736/14.

⁸¹ Grant, Oban, to Malcolm MacFarlane, [No Date] March 1914. NLS Acc.9736/20.

Comunn Litreachais?’⁸² Her dreams of a colourful story book and alphabet in Gaelic never came to fruition, and indeed it would be many years before such reading material in Gaelic was available for children.

Another of Katherine Whyte Grant’s story ideas outlined in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane in 1905 was subsequently written as a play for schoolchildren and eventually published in *An Sgeulaiche* in 1910.⁸³ From this first exposure, the play was then reprinted as an independent sixpenny booklet in the same year and again in 1927. The lack of children’s literature in Gaelic was clearly a concern for Katherine Whyte Grant. She would have been well aware of what was available in English in a period that produced some of what today are regarded as children’s classics. She would also recognise that the oral tales she heard in abundance as a child were not going to be available in the same way for the Gaelic-speaking children of the future,⁸⁴ and thus the child’s sense of a distinctive Gaelic world would be lost.

Katherine Whyte Grant was regularly among the prize-winners in the literary competitions run by An Comunn. At the 1903 Mòd, she won first prize for her essay on the influence of the ’45 in the Gàidhealtachd,⁸⁵ at the 1904 Mòd in Greenock, she again won first prize, this time for an essay ‘setting forth the dangers which threaten the existence of Gaelic as a spoken language, the means to be adopted for its preservation, and the duty of Highlanders under the circumstances’.⁸⁶ In this essay – ‘Na Cunnartan a tha ’bagradh na Gàidhlig’ – she identified the main danger to Gaelic as the dominant position of English in state, church and school affairs, thus blocking the use and development of the Gaelic language, and highlighted in particular the school context:

⁸² The Comunn Litreachais refers to a Gaelic literary academy that MacFarlane and others were involved in setting up at this time to consider standardizing Gaelic orthography and address Gaelic literary needs in general.

⁸³ ‘An Sgoil Bheag agus A’Mhaighdean-Mhara: Cluich air son Clann-Sgoile’ le Catriona Nic Ghille-Bhain Ghrannnd (K. W. G.). First printed in *An Sgeulaiche* (1910); reprinted, 1910 and 1927 (Glasgow: Alex. MacLaren).

⁸⁴ This was a situation that she would have been more acutely aware of in mainland Argyllshire.

⁸⁵ Mrs K. Whyte Grant, ‘Buaidh na Bliadhna ’45 air a Ghaidhealtachd’, *Celtic Monthly*, 12 (1904), 137–139.

⁸⁶ Catriona W. G[h]rannnd, ‘Na Cunnartan a tha ’bagradh na Gàidhlig’, *DG*, 1 (1905–1906), 10–12, 36–38, 45–47.

Tha nis sgoilean Beurla a mhàin bho cheann gu ceann de 'n tìr. Tha iad uile fo 'n aon riaghailt. Tha cuid de na maighstearan-sgoile Gallda a' peanasachadh na cloinne air son gach facail Ghàidhlig a their iad 'san sgoil. Tha a' chuid is modha de 'n chlann a' sgur de bhruidhinn na Gàidhlig an uair a thòisicheas iad air dol do 'n sgoil.⁸⁷

While these were presented as the 'external' forces detrimental to Gaelic, there was also an 'internal' issue to address namely disunity amongst Gaelic activists – Gael arguing with Gael. Another factor identified in declining numbers of Gaelic-speakers was inter-marriage, the Gaelic-speaker taking a Lowland or English spouse, although she was careful to stress that the problem was not with the circumstance but rather its implication for Gaelic – 'An uair a tha so a' gabhail àite, mar is bitheanta, tha a' Ghàidhlig air a cur an cùil às an rathad'. The situation where only one parent spoke Gaelic was of course an increasing reality as second and third generation Gaelic-speakers were now settled in Lowland communities, and it did indeed frequently work against the minority language. Summarising the responsibilities for Gaelic speakers, Katherine Whyte Grant highlighted that parents had a duty to speak Gaelic to their children, and that adults needed to address their lack of literacy in Gaelic.

While the general aim of literary competitions run by An Comunn Gàidhealach was to foster new literary talent in Gaelic,⁸⁸ the prize money was fairly meagre and although there was the added bonus of possible publication, this did not engender additional payment. For someone like Katherine Whyte Grant who was trying to make a living from her writing, the value of her work was not therefore in any way compensated by the prize money. In addition, An Comunn retained the copyright of the work, something she perceived as unjust, and indeed an alien concept to someone brought up with the oral tradition:

Another thing; I had no idea that in getting these articles printed in the Deo-Gréine that I was parting with them to the Comunn. I do not see how they have attained a right to them. Please let me know how it is, for

⁸⁷ G[h]rannd, 'Na Cunnartan a tha 'bagradh na Gàidhlig', 11.

⁸⁸ For example *Uirsgeulan Gaidhealach* (Stirling: Aonghas Mac Aoidh, 1905) included four stories that had been awarded prizes at the Mòd: 'Clach Na Làrain' le Caitriona Whyte G[h]rannd (5–18); 'Oighre 'n Dùin-Bhàin' le D. U. Mac Coinnich (19–32); 'Mòrag Na Làraich-Mheadhoin' le Caitriona Whyte G[h]rannd (33–55); 'Pòsadh an Dealain-Dé' le Eachann Mac Phaidein (56–62). Reprinted in 1912.

I do not understand. Must I really have to ask permission to use what I have not sold to them?⁸⁹

Katherine Whyte Grant had some success in other literary competitions and had prize essays in English published in the *Caledonian Medical Journal* in 1902 and in 1904.⁹⁰ In the first of these, she is clearly writing for a non-Gaelic readership and informing but also refuting and clarifying ‘outsider’ assumptions about Gaelic culture:

Our poetry is accused of being shadowy and indistinct – misty in fact – but we could not leave out these perpetual features of a humid clime if remaining true to Nature. Our poetry never lacks clearness *if read in Gaelic*.⁹¹ [original emphasis]

Throughout the essay, she draws on her knowledge of other literary traditions and cultures to present parallels with Gaelic music and poetry, thus repositioning Gaelic culture in a community of cultures rather than isolated and marginal, or indeed inferior, as it was often portrayed from an English-speaking perspective. She compares the Gaelic work-songs to ‘the rise and fall of the Kaffir’s pick-axe’ or the ‘swing of the ‘Maori’s scythe’ and comments that ‘perhaps the only remnant left in utilitarian England is the “Heave-oh!” of her sailor boys as they pull anchor’.⁹² In the final comment in the essay she positions the Gaelic language in a national and a global context: ‘The Scottish Gaelic is the language of our ancestors, and expresses to us what was best and dearest to them. If it is allowed to die, we lose our distinctive nationality, and the world will be poorer’.⁹³ The ‘one homogenous English-speaking whole’ that in Mathew Arnold’s view was ‘a necessity of modern civilisation’,⁹⁴ did not appeal to Katherine Whyte Grant, who took the perspective that a focus on local cultural diversity created a sense of national inclusiveness. In fact she appreciated diversity at a micro-cultural level, stressing the importance of

⁸⁹ K. W. Grant, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 16 Nov 1907. NLS Acc.9736/48.

⁹⁰ Mrs K. Whyte Grant, New Zealand, ‘The Influence of Scenery and Climate on the Music and Poetry of the Highlands’, *CMJ*, 5 (1902–1904), 103–141; ‘Old Highland Therapy’, *CMJ*, 5 (1902–1904), 356–378.

⁹¹ Grant, *CMJ*, 5, 109.

⁹² Grant, *CMJ*, 5, 110.

⁹³ Grant, *CMJ*, 5, 141.

⁹⁴ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, (London: Smith, Elder, 1867), 12.

lexical distinctiveness and variations in oral tradition across the Gaelic cultural map.⁹⁵

As has already been noted, Katherine Whyte Grant drew strongly on mythical and historical tales from the oral tradition in her writing as a means of inspiring and reinforcing a sense of Gaelic cultural identity in young people in particular, and she also recognised that similar literary material in other languages translated into Gaelic could also be utilised in this way. Translations of exemplar literature from other cultures played an important part in developing a literary language in many national revival movements; it was a means of providing proof that a language could cope with a range of artistic expression and of encouraging the creation of a modern literature in the mother-tongue, as well as introducing ideas considered to be ideologically, morally or educationally beneficial.⁹⁶

Translating work from other literary cultures into Gaelic held a personal fascination for Katherine Whyte Grant, combining her interest in European literature, particularly the nineteenth-century Romantic poets, with her Gaelic writing. She began her translation of *Wilhelm Tell*, working from the original German, during the period she was in Romania in the mid-1870s,⁹⁷ and as it was after this that she began to write in Gaelic, the project may also have had a practical purpose for her literary ambitions. It is perhaps significant that she chose to translate a work based on an international folktale (that had at some point in time become localized in Switzerland) and concerned with a people's struggle for independence, addressing themes of exile, political domination and emergent nationalism.⁹⁸ It is also probable that she recognised traces of the oral antecedents of the tale that would appear

⁹⁵ See chapter 6, 187.

⁹⁶ Literary translations were used, for example, in the Czech national revival 'in order to refine the Czech language', and also in Bulgaria to facilitate 'the development of a literary language'. See: John Neubauer, 'General Introduction', *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, III, 13–15.

⁹⁷ 'A Noted Celtic Authoress', *OT*, 21 Oct 1911. The translation was published in instalments in the *Northern Chronicle*, 3 Sept 1890–31 Mar 1891; and the complete work in *TGSI*, 17 (1890–91), 302–351. The Minute of a meeting of the Gaelic Society of Inverness for 18 May 1891 records that it was Mr Duncan Campbell who proposed that the Society publish 'the Gaelic translation of "William Tell" as it appeared in the "Northern Chronicle" [in the next volume of the *Transactions*]. To which proposal the meeting unanimously agreed'. It was also published as a small booklet in 1893: K.W.G., *Uilleam Tell le Friedrich Schiller: air 'eadar-theangachadh o'n Ghearmailteach gu Gaidhlig* (Inverness: Northern Chronicle, 1893).

⁹⁸ Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell', first published in German in 1804, was translated twelve times into English between 1829 and 1904. See Joseph E. Kestner, 'Ulysses/Tell: Text and Nineteenth Century Context', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 38 (2000–2001), 85–123.

familiar to her from Gaelic tradition,⁹⁹ as well as echoes of MacPherson's Ossianic poems with which she was very familiar.¹⁰⁰ The Swiss hero may have reminded her of the 'action-man' MacDougall warrior, Iain Ciar, outlawed after the battle of Sheriffmuir, and whose adventures she heard about as a child from her grandmother.¹⁰¹ In addition, it was not a work that overly challenged the translator with regard to technical terms for which there were not obvious Gaelic equivalents. Her choice of German literature as subjects for translation was possibly driven by a degree of familiarity and empathy with the works she chose, but also by the fact that she was able to translate from the original, rather than at second-hand, through an English translation. She did, however, indicate a particular motivation for undertaking *Uilleam Tell*:

I longed to give my Highland countrymen a delightful taste of the good things stored up in the literature of other nations, of people whom we consider as alien and foreign, yet with feelings and sympathies closely akin to our own. We need to have our sympathies expanded; we need to get out of the few narrow grooves in which our thoughts are apt to run; to get above ourselves, so that our petty individuality may be merged in the good of the whole.¹⁰²

This was a communitarian ideology frequently reflected in her writing, influenced by her wide experience of other countries and cultures, and underpinned by her personal interpretation of the Christian faith.¹⁰³

The rapid advance of industrialisation and the homogenizing forces of modernity in the second half of the nineteenth century prompted a fear among many people of a loss of community along with the distinctiveness of place. Both Katherine Whyte Grant and Mary MacKellar both reflected this concern, perceiving the erosion of Gaelic cultural memory and tradition within their local areas. Ella Carmichael, on the other hand, was born in 1870 at the beginning of this trajectory of

⁹⁹ See Roger E. Mitchell and Joyce P. Mitchell, 'Schiller's William Tell: A Folkloristic Perspective', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 83:327 (Jan-Mar 1970), 44-52.

¹⁰⁰ Grant, *CMJ*, 5, 119.

¹⁰¹ She wrote about the adventures of Iain Ciar in Gaelic and English. See *Myth, Tradition and Story*, 68-76, and *Aig Tigh na Beinne*, 72-85.

¹⁰² K. W. G., 'Uilleam Tell', *TGSI*, 17 (1890-1), 302-51.

¹⁰³ Between 1879 and 1894, Katherine Whyte Grant was employed as 'Biblewoman' for Lady Victoria Campbell in her philanthropic work with young women in Inverary, Tiree, Mull and Iona. This may not have been continuous service, but there are references to her involvement in this work at various times in the period.

change, and although she had an island upbringing, her family moved to Edinburgh in 1882. She, therefore, embraced the ‘new’ of the *Fin de Siècle*, grasping the opportunity of a university education newly available to those women who could afford it and, as was shown in the previous chapter, she was a modern woman comfortable in the academic and artistic milieu of the city. While the community of the Celtic Union provided a forum for Ella Carmichael’s broad cultural and artistic aspirations for Gaelic, as editor of the *Celtic Review* she was able to extend her Gaelic scholarly and literary interests within a similarly inclusive Celtic context.

Ella Carmichael and the *Celtic Review*

As ‘Acting Editor’ of the *Celtic Review*, first published in July 1904, Ella Carmichael was breaking new ground for a woman in this position in the history of periodicals in the Gaelic cultural domain, although she would possibly have been aware of women who had been pioneers of the editorial position in other literary circles. It is thought that Christian Johnstone (1781–1857) who became editor of the well-known *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in the 1830s was the first woman editor of a periodical in Britain, and she also became the first editor of the *Inverness Courier* in 1817, assisted by her husband.¹⁰⁴ In Ireland, the relatively short-lived literary, political and cultural journal, the *Shan Van Vocht* (1896–99), was established and edited by Alice Milligan and Anna Johnstone, and the nationalist women’s paper *Bean na hÉireann* was initiated by the radical women’s group, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, in 1908, edited by Helena Moloney, although both these examples were seen as female productions.¹⁰⁵ The *Celtic Review*, however, was conceived as a scholarly periodical, a literary space more obviously defined as male territory.¹⁰⁶ The public image of the scholar was a ‘man of letters’¹⁰⁷ and it is not therefore surprising that Ella Carmichael’s name appears below that of the ‘Consulting Editor’, Professor Donald MacKinnon. This was a hierarchy that she probably recognised as a

¹⁰⁴ Robert Crawford, *Scotland’s Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (London: Penguin, 2007), 403.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne: A Life* (London: Pandora, 1990), 96.

¹⁰⁶ A comparable although less ambitious undertaking was the journal of the Manx cultural movement, *Mannin* (1913–17), edited by Sophia Morrison. See Breesha Maddrell, ‘Speaking from the Shadows: Sophia Morrison and the Manx cultural revival’, *Folklore* (2002), 215–236.

¹⁰⁷ See Mary O’Dowd, ‘From Morgan to MacCurtain: Women Historians in Ireland from the 1790s to the 1990s’ in *Women & Irish History*, ed. by Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O’ Dowd (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), 38–58.

necessary endorsement of the scholarly ethos of the publication, although the Professor was also someone she knew well as a family friend and mentor. As a woman surrounded by eminent ‘men of letters’,¹⁰⁸ it is only comparatively recently that any attention has been given to Ella Carmichael as a Gaelic and Celtic scholar in her own right. She had taken the ‘advanced Celtic Class’ as part of her degree at Edinburgh University under Professor MacKinnon,¹⁰⁹ and was therefore well qualified academically to edit a scholarly magazine with a Celtic focus. In addition, she had served a useful apprenticeship in the editorial preparation of *Carmina Gadelica*, published in October 1900.¹¹⁰ The extent of this involvement was hinted at in a eulogy at the time of her death: ‘It is only those who happen to have inside knowledge who can form any idea of the great share she had in producing her father’s monumental work, “*Carmina Gadelica*”’.¹¹¹ It was, however, not unusual in this period for ‘in house’ research assistance provided by wives, daughters or sisters to go unacknowledged publicly, however much their input may have been praised in private.

The *Celtic Review* evolved from an alternative project for a proposed Gaelic Texts Society,¹¹² as is clear from Ella Carmichael’s letters to the priest, scholar and family friend, Father Allan McDonald, and she was anxious to have his opinion on the first edition after it was published:

How do you like the Review? In some ways it would be better to have more Gaelic but I have first to think of what will be most likely to put it on a paying footing and so save Mr Blaikie expenditure on it. We have no organisation to make a more Gaelic paper stable.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Daughter of Alexander Carmichael, wife of Professor William J. Watson, and mother of Professor James Carmichael Watson.

¹⁰⁹ See chapter 4, 121, note 77.

¹¹⁰ See Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, ‘Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*’ in *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008), 1–39.

¹¹¹ ‘Gaeldom’s Loss’, *Northern Chronicle*, 5 Dec 1928. Mary Carmichael’s contribution to the same work, described by her husband as ‘the defining visual feature of *Carmina Gadelica*’ should also be noted, as well as her less obvious intellectual, financial and domestic support for the undertaking. See Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, ‘Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*’, in *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 1–39 (7); and in the same volume, Murdo MacDonald, ‘The Visual Dimension of *Carmina Gadelica*’, 135–145.

¹¹² See John L. Campbell and Trevor Hall, *Strange Things* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006 [1968]), 245. The idea for a Gaelic Texts Society might have been prompted by the Irish Texts Society (founded in London in 1898) of which Eleanor Hull was Hon. Secretary at this time.

¹¹³ E. C. Carmichael, Edinburgh, to Father Allan, 23 Oct 1904. (Canna House Letters)

The economic need to attract a broad readership took precedence over ideological preferences and was a dilemma she was clearly sensitive to, likewise defending the position in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane:

I am as strong on Gaelic as most people but there are many good people interested who through no fault of theirs do not know the language, or not enough of it, and if I overdo the Gaelic the mag. will never pay its expenses which it is desirable it should do in a year or two!¹¹⁴

MacFarlane was preparing an ‘Ossianic Chant’ for the first issue of the periodical and returning his translation for revision with her comments pencilled in the margins, Ella Carmichael was carefully negotiating the uncharted waters of traditional gender hierarchy in asserting her editorial authority:

I am afraid you will be pretty tired of the enclosed but I am going to ask you to kindly consider the pencil notes I have made on one of these copies. [...] I think I ought to tell you that Professor MacKinnon and I read over the poem tonight and that he neither suggested nor approved of all I have put on the margins in pencil. I think that you will understand the spirit in which we make these suggestions. If you feel that you can make improvements in the English by not keeping too closely to the Gaelic please just do so. [...] meantime perhaps you will be considering the notes I made.¹¹⁵

Although suggesting a preference for a more ‘creative’ translation, MacFarlane chose to ignore this hint, and when the ballad was published, the English version was described as a ‘literal translation’.

In editing the *Review*, Ella Carmichael could call on the support of a wide circle of key figures in Gaelic and Celtic scholarship as well as activists in pan-Celtic cultural movements. From within her father’s Gaelic circle, there was a group of scholars more or less ‘on her doorstep’ whom she could readily approach for contributions. As well as Father Allan and Professor MacKinnon, there were also George Henderson, Kenneth MacLeod, Donald MacKechnie and W. J. Watson.¹¹⁶ All of these, with the exception of the Eriskay priest, contributed to the first volume and, as is the way of these things, they in turn opened doors to other scholarly

¹¹⁴ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, [postmarked 1904]. NLS Acc. 9736/38.

¹¹⁵ E. C. Carmichael to Malcolm MacFarlane, 16 June 1904. The paper by MacFarlane was: ‘Garabh agus Na Mnathan’, *CR*, 1 (1904–05), 32–47.

¹¹⁶ The last named who would become her husband.

networks. Ella Carmichael was well-known in Celtic circles, as has already been highlighted, and throughout the years of the *Review* she frequently attended the Welsh Eisteddfod, the Irish Oireachtas and the Pan-Celtic Congress as a representative of either An Comunn or the Celtic Union. These would certainly have been ideal opportunities to secure promises of papers for her publication and ensure an inclusive Celtic representation.

Women who found themselves in positions of influence in this period were often able to encourage or help other women to progress their ambitions. It has been noted, for example, that there was an unusually high number of women writing for *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* when Christian Johnstone was editor,¹¹⁷ and similarly when Eleanor Hull was Secretary of the Irish Texts Society she was able to offer a number of women the chance to edit texts for the Society and to serve on its council.¹¹⁸ Ella Carmichael's involvement in female Pan-Celtic networks is reflected in the women who contributed papers to the *Celtic Review* and the number of books by female authors that were regularly reviewed. There are articles written by women covering a Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Breton provenance and their subjects range across a spectrum of interest, leaning strongly towards mythological tales and folklore but also covering history, literature and travelogue. Ella Carmichael contributed only four items across the run of the publication, although this is perhaps not surprising when the extent of her work as Editor is considered alongside all the other areas of her Gaelic cultural activity, as well as her domestic responsibilities. In the main she writes on Gaelic folklore, drawing considerably, and with acknowledgement, on her father's material,¹¹⁹ as well as on her own work in the same field.¹²⁰

In the first issue of the *Celtic Review*, the Gaelic scholar Alexander MacBain (1855–1907) reviewed *Gods and Fighting Men* by Lady Augusta Gregory and *The End of the Song* by the Countess of Cromartie.¹²¹ The two authors were in the same

¹¹⁷ Fraser, Green and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, 38.

¹¹⁸ See O' Dowd, 'From Morgan to MacCurtain' in Valiulis and O' Dowd, *Women & Irish History*, 38–58 (48).

¹¹⁹ 'Most of my information is got from my father. I am also indebted to Mr Kenneth Macleod.' See E. C. Watson, 'Highland Mythology', *CR*, 5 (1908–09), 48–70.

¹²⁰ For example: E. C. Carmichael, 'Never was Piping so Sad, and Never was Piping so Gay', *CR*, 2 (1905–06), 76–84, which she introduces with: 'Here are some stories of fairy pipes which I have heard in the Hebrides, and now translate from Gaelic'.

¹²¹ 'Book Reviews', *CR*, 1 (1904–1905), 77–93, (87–89).

Anglo-Celtic aristocratic circle¹²² and they both drew on the myths and tales of their respective Irish and Highland traditions in their writing. With reference to Lady Gregory's book, MacBain quoted from its preface written by W. B. Yeats, which stated that 'the book is not meant for such as have retained and value their Gaelic birthright, but rather for those who, whether of the Gaelic race or not, have not had the advantage of hearing these tales by the turf fires', adding his own view that: 'these tales never lose their charm, and the English words which Lady Gregory has given them are *almost* as delightful as their natural Gaelic'.¹²³ [my emphasis] This was treading carefully on what was unstable ground in Irish Gaelic Revival circles, where opinion on the 'Irishness' of Anglo-Irish writing and its usefulness in the Irish Revival was fiercely divided.¹²⁴ There was not the same ideological difficulty from a Scottish Gaelic perspective with what might be described as Anglo-Highland writing, and in his review of Lady Cromartie's book MacBain declares the Highland 'birthright' of the author in a way that could not perhaps be so unequivocally claimed for her Irish counterpart: 'Lady Cromartie weaves tales of her own native Highlands. [She] writes as a Highlander and from the inside, of a life and of a people which are her own by heredity'.¹²⁵ Similarly, a review of a collection of poems by Miss A. C. MacDonell, *Songs of the Mountain and the Burn*, states that: 'Miss MacDonell's poems show strongly her Gaelic inheritance, and are sure to be appreciated by Highlanders'.¹²⁶ There could be no disputing Alice C. MacDonell's Gaelic heritage, her parents both being great grand-children of Alexander of Keppoch who fell at Culloden,¹²⁷ although while she was credited with having 'a knowledge of her native language', it is not clear to what extent she could speak it. She would certainly have been surrounded by Gaelic in her childhood in Lochaber, and she used this knowledge in a limited way in her writing, incorporating Gaelic greetings or endearments in her prose, or a Gaelic title or refrain in her verse. If there was an acceptance from within the Gaelic movement of Anglo-Highland writers who could claim a genuine Highland 'heredity', as the examples given above suggest,

¹²² See chapter 2, 33, note 28.

¹²³ *CR*, 1 (1904–05), 87–89 (88).

¹²⁴ For discussion of the different sides of the argument see O'Leary, *Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival*, 281–354.

¹²⁵ *CR*, 1 (1904–05), 87–89 (89).

¹²⁶ *CR*, 8 (1911–12), 362.

¹²⁷ 'Gaelic Poets: The Bardess of Clan Donald', *People's Journal*, 7 July 1906.

there was a degree of unease with writers who used the loosely applied designation ‘Celtic’ to imply a Gaelic authenticity, particularly where there was no obvious ‘Gaelic inheritance’. In the review of Lady Cromartie’s book quoted above, Alexander MacBain commented with reference to her style that: ‘It is not a Celtic veneer, and there is no make believe of deciphering the temperament of the Celt, no dissecting him as if he were some newly discovered vertebrate under the knife and the microscope of the would-be scientist.’¹²⁸ A ‘Celtic veneer’ was the trademark of the writer ‘Fiona MacLeod’, the female identity invented by the Scottish literary figure William Sharp, and behind which he wrote a considerable body of poetry and prose in romantic ‘Celtic Twilight’ style, writing that frequently emphasised the qualities that many people thought of as essential to the Celtic temperament. The subject of the nature of the Celtic psyche, as has been referred to already,¹²⁹ was an on-going undercurrent in the *fin de siècle* period, setting the characteristics of the straight-thinking, rational Anglo-Saxon against those of the spiritual, emotional Celt, the latter, by implication, incapable of dealing with the cut and thrust of the modern world.¹³⁰ The same emotional qualities, as noted already, were also attributed to the female mind and cited as reasons that women were unsuited to the challenge of intellectual and political activity. Women in a Gaelic cultural context were therefore doubly misrepresented by the writing of ‘Fiona MacLeod’. The writer, not surprisingly, did not appear in public, and there was on-going speculation as to who ‘she’ actually was. On at least one occasion this debate became so pervasive that a public statement was published on behalf of ‘Fiona MacLeod’, stating that she was ‘much annoyed at this continued identification [...] with this or that man or woman of letters’ emphasising that: ‘she writes only under the name of Fiona MacLeod: that name is her own and that all she asks is the courtesy both of good breeding and common sense – a courtesy which is the right of all, and surely imperative of a woman acting for and by herself’.¹³¹ It is perhaps not surprising that Ella Carmichael, as a woman with a Celtic, Gaelic and literary public profile, was seen by some as a likely candidate to be the woman hiding behind the pen-name ‘Fiona

¹²⁸ *CR*, 1 (1904–05), 89.

¹²⁹ See chapter 1, 16–17.

¹³⁰ Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature*.

¹³¹ “‘Fiona MacLeod’s’ Identity”, *OT*, 20 May 1899.

MacLeod'. In a letter on the subject to Father Allan in 1900, she revealed her own suspicions regarding the true identity of the writer:

I am very anxious to know [who she is] for several reasons, one that many people suppose I am "Fiona MacLeod". As if I would make out Highlanders to be such soft-brained lunatics! [...] Have you seen any man or woman wandering about Uist who could possibly write these things under the name "Fiona MacLeod"? Have you ever seen or known of Mr William Sharp being in Uist?¹³²

At the start of the following year she again referred to the subject, having sent the priest a copy of 'Fiona MacLeod's' book, *Phàrais, A Romance of the Isles*:

I wonder if you will like it? I have never spoken [...] to any Celt who did like them, they do not seem to take among the race they are supposed to represent – but Sassanachs like them and think she is just the Celtic thing.¹³³

The answer to the question posed in this letter can be found in the book, *Father Allan's Island* where Amy Murray, referring to *Phàrais* as 'sent by another hand not long before', records Father Allan's opinion of its author as 'just another MacPherson's Ossian [...] [and] she's got all her Gaelic – where it isn't wrong – from Mrs Mary MacKellar's *Guide to the Highlands*'.¹³⁴ The second point is quite obviously the case, and reveals an intriguing use of Mary MacKellar's work as a language source to substantiate a (faked) Gaelic-speaking identity. However, while it is easy enough to string Gaelic phrases together to make a decidedly stilted conversation, 'Tha mi glé sgith; Tha an t'acras orm; Tha am pathadh orm, Tha mi fliuch',¹³⁵ there are plenty pitfalls in this strategy for someone who does not know the workings of the language, and therefore basic mistakes abound. Others inside the Gaelic movement were similarly unconvinced by the assumed Gaelic identity of 'Fiona MacLeod':

¹³² Ella C. Carmichael to Father Allan, 4 Dec 1900. Canna House Letters.

¹³³ Ella C. Carmichael to Father Allan, 2 Jan 1901. Canna House Letters.

¹³⁴ Amy Murray, *Father Allan's Island*, (Edinburgh & London: The Moray Press, 1936 [New York, 1920]), 195. It was Mary MacKellar's *Tourist Handbook of Gaelic and English Phrases* to which Father Allan was referring here – Amy Murray possibly confusing it with the guide-book by the same author. See this chapter, 149–151.

¹³⁵ Fiona MacLeod, *Phàrais* (New York, Duffield, 1907 [1894]), 116. Mary MacKellar gives all these phrases on pages 5 and 6 of her phrase-book. There are many other examples confirming the booklet as the source for Fiona MacLeod's Gaelic.

Ged a tha i a' sgrìobhadh le spéis agus le mùirn a thaobh na Gàidhealtachd, tha amharus làidir aig mòran dhaoine nach ban-Ghàidheal i idir. Chan eil e duilich fhaicinn nach eil eòlas mionaideach aice air a' Ghàidhlig agus nach eil i comasach aon chuid air a labhairt no sgrìobhadh gu h-eagarra no gu ceart. Tha i ri mearachdan thall 's a bhos a thaobh grammar agus cruth na cànan. Tha i a' tuisleadh a cheart cho tric 'nuair tha i a' sgrìobhadh mu sheann uirsgeulan na Gàidhealtachd, agus tha i gu minic a measgachadh a suas sgeulachdan Lochlannach agus Eireannach maille ri beul-aithris nan Gàidheal. [...] Na'n innseadh i a fìor ainm, agus shloinneadh, chite nach robh coir no dlighe aice tighinn mar coinneamh 'an cruth ban-Ghàidheal. Mhilleadh so a cliu. Air an aobhar sin cha chluinn sinn gu brath cò i da-rìreadh Fiona NicLeòid!¹³⁶

However, while these weaknesses were obvious to Gaelic-speakers, to those who lacked knowledge of the Gaelic language and Gaelic tradition, 'Fiona MacLeod' was accepted as an authentic Gaelic and female voice:

It is by the spirit in which she writes that Miss MacLeod represents in a native and novel manner the genius of the Gael. [...] [H]ere for the first time in English it is a sennachy herself that writes; [...] and the Gael is pictured not as he appears to the outsider, but as he is known only to himself, and to himself only perhaps at inspired times.¹³⁷

Although Ella Carmichael interacted closely with the 'Celtic Twilight' literary circle of Sharp, she was clearly unconvinced by 'Fiona MacLeod'. However, as her letter to Father Allan suggests, in being associated with the 'false authenticity' that Sharp's writing offered to a non-Gaelic public, she perhaps felt somehow implicated in its deceit. This is a further indication that, as discussed in the previous chapter, her position as an intermediary between the Celtic Revival literati and the Gaelic community of her childhood was at times a complicated liason role.

Ella Carmichael was editor of the *Celtic Review* for its lifespan from July 1904 to June 1916, ten volumes in total, an impressive enough record for such a publication and it might well have continued for longer but for the onset of the First World War. The publication kept to a consistent standard, managing to combine academic articles with those of more general Celtic subject-matter and thus covered

¹³⁶ 'Cò i Fiona Nic'Leòid?', *OWN*, 13 Dec 1905.

¹³⁷ 'The Gael Again', *Scots Pictorial*, 8 May 1897, 142.

a broad spectrum of interest, while still maintaining a scholarly ethos. A review, ironically of the very last issue (June 1916), praised the magazine as a valuable aid to Celtic study, stating that ‘other periodicals concerned with things Celtic may be ephemeral, but the *Celtic Review* has carved a niche of its own, and will command attention’.¹³⁸ If it did at times drift into the ‘Celtic Twilight’ zone, there were very few of the Celtic periodicals in Scotland at that time that managed to steer clear of this influence. It was a culturally auspicious time for such a literary venture, with the interest in Celtic languages and culture in full flow at a number of levels, and with the Pan-Celtic movement becoming more firmly established. For Ella Carmichael, well known in such networks and surrounded by supportive, influential and admiring men, it was also a favourable moment for her to be at the editorial helm. Yet the challenge should not be underestimated, particularly as she continued with the magazine after her marriage in 1906 and the birth of her son in 1910, at a time when social opinion expected married middle-class women to commit solely to the domestic sphere.

There were some detractors, however, such as John MacKay, who referred in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane in August 1904 to ‘that theatrical blue stocking, Miss E. C.’.¹³⁹ While his remarks were possibly provoked by his anxiety over having to compete with another Celtic periodical on the market, it is clear from other comments that he did not approve of women in general in the public domain. Ironically, when he died in 1909 leaving a family of young children, his wife, Annie Maclean MacKay, almost seamlessly took over his position as editor of the *Celtic Monthly*, suggesting that she had possibly been involved in the work of the magazine behind the scenes and unacknowledged. In her first issue in charge, her name, given simply as A. M. MacKay, appeared without any further explanation as the contact for ‘communications on literary and business matters’, and the magazine continued as normal. Certainly widowhood was acknowledged as a particular circumstance in which a woman could carry on her husband’s business without any loss of social standing, although this was often understood as ‘holding the fort’ until a son or other male relative was in a position to take over.¹⁴⁰ However, it was probably an

¹³⁸ ‘The Celtic Review’, *DG*, 12 (1916–17), 15.

¹³⁹ John MacKay, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 18 August 1904. NLS Acc. 9736/133.

¹⁴⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (London: Routledge, 2002), 284 & 287. The 1891 Census shows that before her marriage, Annie MacKay was employed as a ‘publisher’s

economic necessity for Annie MacKay to have some form of income to support her family, and in fact she edited the magazine for another eight years until December 1917, when the high cost of paper and printing as a result of the War forced her to give up.¹⁴¹

Chapter Conclusions

As this chapter has illustrated, sustained literary activity by women in the Gaelic movement was constricted by their gender, educational opportunity and economic circumstances, and therefore even those women who had the necessary level of Gaelic literacy, literary talent and ideological commitment were not always able to achieve their ambitions in this direction. However, a closer examination across a wider spectrum of literary genres and literary activities reveals a small number of women who were committed to this area of the Gaelic cause, despite the challenges they frequently faced. Mary MacKellar, Katherine Whyte Grant and Ella Carmichael in particular brought their individual experiences and perspectives to their Gaelic literary activity. Responding to new literary contexts, experimenting with diverse genres, and innovatively thinking about the literary needs of Gaelic, they sought ways to realise their literary ambitions as women and to progress the Gaelic language and culture in this way.

While Ella Carmichael's relatively comfortable economic position allowed her the freedom to develop the *Celtic Review*, the two older women were without any such financial backing or economic security. They were, however, all living and working in a bilingual and a bicultural context, a duality that influenced their literary ideas as well as bringing them new literary opportunities. The economic balance was weighted towards English and therefore however much their 'heart and voice' was committed to the Gaelic cause, their 'bread and butter' needs dictated the extent to which they were able to do so in their writing, as Katherine Whyte Grant starkly articulated to Malcolm MacFarlane: '[U]nless I can make a little more, my Gaelic work must at once end'.¹⁴²

clerk' and therefore she would have had useful practical knowledge and experience of the publishing trade.

¹⁴¹ 'Notice to Readers, Subscribers and Contributors', *Celtic Monthly*, 26 (1917), 250.

¹⁴² K. W. Grant to Malcolm MacFarlane, 5 Nov 1907. NLS Acc. 9736/43.

It is clear that a deeply felt sense of place and ancestral connection underpinned the creative literary output of both Mary Mackellar and Katherine Whyte Grant and in bringing their knowledge of the distinctive Gaelic oral tradition of their home districts to their literary endeavours, they recognised new contexts in which that knowledge could be both preserved and made available to others. This particular aspect of their work is given further attention in the next chapter in which an intuitive responsibility to a communal history in a particular place is explored in the context of the women who published collections of Gaelic song and lore.



Plate 6: Mary MacKellar. (*Celtic Monthly*, 1 (1892–93), 117.



Plate 7: Katherine Whyte Grant, (*People's Journal*, 14 Dec 1907)

6

Recording and Representing:
Women Collectors of Gaelic Song and Lore

I had for Auld Lang Syne – purchased MacKenzie’s Beauties,¹ which I never liked – calling it a ‘man’s book’ merely, and not congenial to me as the simple strains of my old waulking women always were.²

My first thought was to get the songs down and I didn’t look beyond that. But when I began looking over what I had, I saw that it was a tapestry: their whole way of life was in the songs.³

The second quotation, above, describes the personal epiphany experienced by Margaret Fay Shaw (1903–2004) in her song-collecting work, when she realised that the Gaelic songs she was collecting were closely interwoven with the people and all aspects of their way of life in a particular community and place. In her valuable collection, *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*, published in 1955,⁴ Margaret Fay Shaw carefully recorded text and melody of the ‘everyday songs’,⁵ along with personal recollections of singer, song and place. Her collection can be seen as continuing and developing the collecting approach and cultural sensitivity of Frances Tolmie’s song collection published almost half a century earlier in 1911. As the first quote, above, indicates, Frances Tolmie felt strongly that the published collections she knew as a young woman were not representative of the song tradition as she experienced it in her home and community; her own collection, therefore, was a conscious divergence from the antiquarian spirit and detached ‘collecting and collating’ ethos of many of the earlier, and predominately male, collectors of Gaelic

¹ Referring to John MacKenzie, ed., *Sàr Obair nam Bàrd Gàelach*; or, *The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry and lives of the Highland Bards* (Glasgow: MacGregor, Polson & Co., 1841).

² Frances Tolmie to Lucy Broadwood, 8 June 1909. Copy in NLS Acc.7040/9, Papers of Miss Rose Ethel Bassin.

³ Margaret Fay Shaw, *From the Alleghenies to the Hebrides* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1999), 84.

⁴ Margaret Fay Shaw, *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1955).

⁵ Shaw, *From the Alleghenies to the Hebrides*, 81.

song and lore. This chapter discusses the women, including Frances Tolmie, who were collecting Gaelic songs and lore in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, exploring the different approaches and perspectives they brought to this activity. It examines their individual collecting situations, particularly the links between their personal engagement with the material they collected and their gender, social background and different cultural affinities, and how this was reflected in their published collections. Their interaction with different collecting and Gaelic networks within the wider context of the Gaelic movement is also explored and discussed.

Internal and External Collecting Influences

The formal collecting of Scottish Gaelic lore began in the eighteenth century,⁶ but it was in the nineteenth and continuing into the twentieth century that there was a particular concentration on collecting, when a number of important collections were published. A constant undercurrent in much of this collecting activity was the urgency to preserve the lore of a culture that was perceived to be rapidly disappearing, although some collectors had voiced a similar pessimistic view in the previous century: ‘In less than twenty years, it would be vain to attempt a collection of Highland music. Perhaps it is rather late at present’.⁷ In 1870, the collector John Francis Campbell was urging: ‘all Highlanders to do everything possible to save the rapidly disappearing ancient Celtic Tales and Legends’,⁸ a plea which proved to be a catalyst for the formation of the Gaelic Society of Inverness the following year, a body that also took up the call to collect:

Especially would we urge upon members to supply us with the folk-lore of their districts, and with papers and MSS bearing upon the genius, literature, history, and antiquities of the Celt at home and abroad.⁹

⁶ John MacInnes, ‘The Scottish Gaelic Language’ in *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes*, ed. by Michael Newton, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 92–119 (108). See Donald Meek, ‘verse, heroic’, in *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Derick S. Thomson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987 [1983]), 294–295.

⁷ Voiced by Patrick MacDonald in the introduction to his collection, *Highland Vocal Airs*, published in 1784. Quoted in Rev William Matheson, ‘Some Early Collectors of Gaelic Folk-Song’, *The Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society*, 5 (1954–55), 67–82 (67).

⁸ Frank Thompson, ‘John Francis Campbell’, *TGSI*, 54 (1986), 1–57 (3). Campbell had at this stage already published *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (Edinburgh: Edmonton & Douglas, vols 1 and 2, 1860; vols 3 and 4, 1862).

⁹ ‘Introduction’, *TGSI*, 3 & 4 (1874–5), i–xx (xx).

A sense of antiquarian collecting is evident in a number of the papers discussing manuscript song collections that were published in the *Transactions* of the Society, where terms such as ‘fragments’, ‘snatches’ and ‘scraps’ highlight the view that these were seen as cultural remnants rather than a living tradition. It should be noted at this point that the collecting of Gaelic oral literature was predominately undertaken by men, with a strong representation of Presbyterian clergy among them. It is not surprising, therefore, that the songs associated with female contexts, and the waulking song tradition in particular, were often passed over in favour of poetry that was seen as reflecting a ‘high’ culture and emphasising the heroic, and masculine, values of the Gael.¹⁰ This bias was further emphasised in the wake of the ‘Ossian’ enquiry of 1805, which in itself stimulated the collecting of oral material.¹¹ In collections where songs from the women’s tradition were given any attention, they were often included almost as an afterthought, as in the examples of *The Gesto Collection*, where they were put in an appendix, and in *Sàr-Obair nam Bàrd Gaelach*, where a small selection of ‘luinneagan’ at the end of the book is referred to as ‘an appropriate and valuable appendage’.¹² This neglect was not necessarily an opposition to the female voice *per se* since examples of songs composed by women who were recognised as semi-professional public poets were sometimes included,¹³ but was more a filtering out of songs that did not sit comfortably with the image of the Gael which certain Gaelic-speaking scholars and collectors wanted to reflect to outside critics.¹⁴ It is possible that the gentlemen of the clergy who collected may have been more likely to reject women’s songs that were less than modest, although this was possibly a general reason for female exclusions in the Victorian period. However, even in the early twentieth century, Ruairaidh Erskine of Marr cautioned

¹⁰ John MacInnes, ‘The Choral Tradition in Scottish Gaelic Song’ in *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal*, 211–229 (229). See also William Gillies, ‘On the Study of Gaelic Literature’ in *Litreachas & Eachdraidh Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig* 2, ed. by Michel Byrne, Thomas Owen Clancy & Sheila Kidd (Glaschu: Roinn na Ceiltis, Oilthigh Ghlaschu, 2006), 1–32 (6).

¹¹ Donald E. Meek, ‘Faking the ‘True Gael’? *Carmina Gadelica* and the Beginning of Modern Gaelic Scholarship’, *Aiste*, 1 (2007), 76–106 (90).

¹² MacKenzie, *Sàr Obair*, 391. For discussion on the neglect of women tradition-bearers by later collectors and the importance of female domestic activity in maintaining Gaelic songs and lore, see Maighread A. Challan, *Air Billeán an t-Sluaigh: Sealladh air Leantailachd Beul-Aithris Ghàidhlig Uibhist a Tuath* (Belfast: Cló Ollscoil na Banríona, 2012), 179–184.

¹³ See Michel Byrne, ‘A Window on the late Eighteenth-Century Scottish Highlands: The Songs of Mairead Ghriogarach’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 30 (2010), 39–60, 41 (n.7).

¹⁴ See Gillies, ‘On the study of Gaelic Literature’, 5–9; Donald E. Meek, ‘Faking the ‘True Gael’?’, 76–106.

Malcolm MacFarlane against including such examples in a series he was writing on female poets for *Guth na Bliadhna*:

As feminism is much in the air at present, I think your idea of an anthology of Bardesses a very good one. [...] It would not do to publish Silis's erotic verse, as they are so very outspoken. It might offend many, which is best avoided.¹⁵

With the development of folklore as a discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the formation of the Folklore Society in 1878, collectors were encouraged to go out among the people and collect 'in the field'. The aforementioned John Francis Campbell was prominent amongst those who took up a more scholarly and systematic approach to collecting and he was influential in encouraging a group of Gaelic-speaking men to collect in the Gàidhealtachd, advising not just accuracy in transcribing texts but also in recording information on the singer of the song or the teller of the tale, and other related data.¹⁶ One of Campbell's *protégés* was Alexander Carmichael who would become a very important and influential collector of Gaelic oral and material culture. The devotion to an ideal of Gaelic masculinity that had dominated much of the earlier collecting would be challenged by Alexander Carmichael in his later collecting, and it is not therefore surprising that some of the women who appear in this chapter were offered his encouragement and support in their collecting endeavours.¹⁷

In general in the second half of the nineteenth century, earlier antiquarian interests in collecting began to reflect more scholarly ambitions. In England, this brought about the formation of The Folklore Society in 1878, encouraged by a wider appreciation of the collecting field from publications of collected oral material from

¹⁵ R. E. of Marr, Brighton, to Malcolm MacFarlane, [No Date] Feb 1914. NLS Acc.9736/20. Referring to the poet, Sileas na Ceapaich. See Ronald Black, ed., *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 22–28.

¹⁶ See Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'Màiri Bhreac agus Gàidsear an Fhéilidh: Màiri Stiùbhart, Alasdair MacGillemhicheil, na thug i seachad agus na rinn e leis', in *Caindel Alban: Fèill-Sgrìobhainn do Dhòmhall E Meek*, ed. by Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy McGuire, (Aberdeen: Oilthigh Obar Dheathain, 2008), [Scottish Gaelic Studies, 24], 551–571 (551); Also Ronald Black, 'I thought he made it all up: Context and Controversy' in *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008), 57–81 (58–59).

¹⁷ Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*', in Stiùbhart, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 1–39 (17).

other countries.¹⁸ Women were to the fore in this new area of study, and Eliza Gutch (1840–1931) and Alice Gomme (1852–1938) were founder members of the Society.¹⁹ The appeal of the subject for women was demonstrated at the first International Folklore Congress held in London in 1891, where it was reported to the press that ‘ladies dominated the audience’.²⁰ The Folk-Song Society, which formed in 1898, also attracted female participation from the outset with the collector and musician, Lucy Broadwood, as an influential founder member. Within the social codes of the period, collecting folklore and folk-song was generally approved as a respectable pursuit for women, although there were certain class-related social parameters to be observed. The discussion in this chapter will show that these internal and external collecting contexts, along with the impetus of the Celtic Revival and the activities of the Gaelic movement, were variable influences on the motivation and perspectives of the women who were collecting Gaelic songs and lore.

Brought up in the tradition

Family and communal female domestic contexts were traditionally an environment where Gaelic songs were sung and transmitted and it was in this organic way that many women acquired their knowledge of the song tradition and in particular the songs as they were sung in their own district. It was said of Màiri Mhòr nan Òran that the social environment and community of her early years in Skye had ‘stor[ed] her mind with the lays and lyrics of her native isle’.²¹ However, as was noted in the previous chapter,²² she did not have the literacy skills to transfer these songs to the written page. While the three women who feature in this section acquired their knowledge of the songs from a similar early exposure to the oral tradition, in contrast to Màiri Mhòr they were all literate in both Gaelic and English and were thus able to

¹⁸ Alexander Fenton, ‘Phases of Ethnology in Britain with special reference to Scotland’, *Ethnologia Europaea*, 20:2 (1990), 177–188 (179–180).

¹⁹ See Georgina Boyes, ‘Alice Bertha Gomme (1852–1938): A Reassessment of the Work of a Folklorist’, *Folklore*, 101:2 (1990), 198–208 (198); Chris Wingfield and Chris Gosden, ‘An Imperial Folklore? Establishing the Folklore Society in London’, in Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin, eds, *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe during the long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 255–274 (261).

²⁰ Richard Mercer Dorson, *The British Folklorists* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999 [1968]), 801.

²¹ Alastair Mac-Bheathain, ‘Life of Mrs. Mary MacPherson’, in *Dain agus Orain Ghàidhlig* (Inverness, A. & U. Mac-Coinnich, 1891), xi.

²² See chapter 5, 146.

make a written record of the tradition they grew up with. It is unlikely that any of these women would have used the word ‘collector’ to describe themselves, in the way that those involved in the field-work of the Folklore Society would have understood the term. They were Gaelic-speaking women who were ‘recollecting’ their own oral heritage; women who each had a store of memorised songs and lore absorbed from the living tradition that was around them in their early years. It is not then surprising that the published results of this ‘collecting’ has a strong geographical bias towards their home territory, reflecting the place and community in which they first heard the songs. Although they all spent most of their lives away from their home district, they retained a bias and authority for the songs and stories they had heard within the intimacy of their domestic circle and local community.

The first part of this section considers the collecting activity of Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant, who, as discussed in the previous chapter, were both trying to make a living as writers, and they incorporated their ‘collecting’ into prose articles or biographical essays. The remainder of this section will focus on Frances Tolmie, who eventually, in later life, published the song collection that she began as a young woman.

Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant

It is very likely that Mary MacKellar retained a considerable body of oral lore from her exposure as a young girl to what, at the time, was a vibrant oral tradition in Lochaber.²³ She later incorporated this knowledge in prose articles that describe different aspects of the tradition and in particular the female social contexts where the songs were sung. In her formative years Mary MacKellar often lived with her maternal grandparents at Coire Beag on the shores of Loch Eil. Her grandfather, Duncan MacDiarmid, was known locally as a fine seanachaidh, and Mary MacKellar herself referred to her grandmother, Mary Cameron, as ‘well-known in Sunart and Lochaber as a sweet poetess, and as a gentlewoman of great refinement of feeling and unbounded charity’.²⁴ She was therefore surrounded by songs and stories in her childhood and she frequently drew on this rich source in her writing. In one of her

²³ The parish of Kilmallie was recorded as being 85% Gaelic-speaking in 1881. Hugh Cheape, ‘Etymologies and Traditions: A Lochaber Minister’s Notebook, 1858–1864’, *SGS*, 19 (1999), 66–82 (67).

²⁴ Mary MacKellar, ‘Unknown Lochaber Bards’, *TGSI*, 12 (1885–86), 211–226 (216).

papers she refers to her ‘collection’ of songs: ‘I cannot do anything like justice to my subject in a limited paper like this, but I hope to give my collection of the songs of these unknown bards in a more extended form in the course of time’.²⁵ While it is clear that many of the songs and tales that she writes about are recollections from her youth, there are also references that suggest she was at times actively collecting - ‘I give it here as I got it from a good old dairymaid many years ago’²⁶ and ‘Of some of those milking liltis I could only get a verse’.²⁷ At the time of Mary MacKellar’s death in 1890, it was noted that: ‘She had gathered much folk-lore and many legends and songs, a goodly portion of which she has published, but most of it, we fear, has died with her’.²⁸ The same article states that her ‘most important papers’ were those published in the *Transactions* of the Gaelic Society of Inverness.²⁹ These are ethnographic accounts of key female domestic contexts – the waulking day and the sheiling – in which she includes a spectrum of oral tradition in a narrative that draws on her personal connection as a Gaelic-speaking woman with these activities, as well as her experience as a writer and a collector. In these papers there is an emphasis on personal knowledge, attachment and recollection rather than strictly objective, and detached, collecting. Although Mary MacKellar frequently presented an idyllic pastoral picture, her writing is a valuable record of Lochaber oral tradition, and in particular of female social contexts to which male Gaelic scholars or collectors would not have had the same access.

There are some similarities with Mary MacKellar in the way Katherine Whyte Grant incorporates her knowledge of Gaelic oral tradition retained from her early years in Appin into her literary work. In the Preface to her book *Myth, Tradition and Story from Western Argyll*, published near the end of her life, Katherine Whyte Grant acknowledged this legacy: ‘The greater part of the book was received at first hand, much of it through my Grandmother, and other relatives’.³⁰ She also refers to her early interest in collecting and notes that the fragment of *Bàs Oscair* published in the book was ‘taken down from the recitation of an old lady in

²⁵ MacKellar, ‘Unknown Lochaber Bards’, 211.

²⁶ Mary MacKellar, ‘The Sheiling: Its Traditions and Songs’, *TGSI*, 15 (1888–89), 151–171 (163).

²⁷ MacKellar, ‘The Sheiling’, 169.

²⁸ ‘Mary MacKellar, Bard and Seanachie’, *Highland Monthly*, 2 (1890–91), 434–440 (439).

²⁹ See chapter 5, 149, note 26.

³⁰ Katherine Whyte Grant, *Myth, Tradition and Story from Western Argyll* (Oban: Oban Times Press, 1925).

Benderloch some 60 years ago'.³¹ An editorial preface to Volume 5 of the *Caledonian Medical Journal* which published Katherine Whyte Grant's Gunning Prize Essay in 1902,³² states that: 'Her materials have been gathered more from actual converse with living people, and from oral tradition, than from books'.³³ However, as a result of her experience of living and working in central Europe as well as in the colonies she was alerted to similarities between aspects of Gaelic folklore and that of some other cultures, and this comparison became a source of fascination and inspiration to her. The collecting of folk-tales and folk-songs, encouraged by the ideas of romantic nationalism espoused by J. G. Herder and, in particular, following the example of the Brothers Grimm, was under way in many European countries during the nineteenth century.³⁴ Katherine Whyte Grant may have been familiar with the Grimm brothers' collection, first published in German in 1812, and in English in 1823.³⁵ From her own Gaelic background, she was acquainted with John Francis Campbell's *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, published in four volumes between 1860 and 1862, in which Campbell points to similarities and overlap between tales of different cultures.³⁶ This cross-cultural interest encouraged her to make Gaelic translations of some of the traditional tales and poetry she encountered in other countries,³⁷ and to explore the 'resemblances or dissimilarities' between the oral traditions of different cultures:

The point is that no sooner does one begin to recognise points of resemblance between our own mythical creations and those of our neighbours then one is allured into all sorts of inviting bypaths, which lead into ever widening circles of families and kindred, nationally and racially inter-related, till one is led to explain, "God has indeed made of

³¹ Grant, *Myth, Tradition and Story*, 20.

³² 'Editorial', *CMJ*, 5:3 (1902), 103–04 (103).

³³ Mrs K. Whyte Grant, 'The Influence of Scenery and Climate on the Music and Poetry of the Highlands', *CMJ*, 5:3 (1902), 105–141.

³⁴ See Timothy Baycroft, 'Introduction' in *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe*, 1–10 (8); Fiona M. MacDonald, 'Narrative Collection and Scholarship', in *Oral Literature and Performance Culture*, ed. by John Beech, Owen Hand, Fiona MacDonald, Mark A. Mulhern and Jeremy Weston, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 9–27 (16).

³⁵ *German Popular Stories* translated [by Edgar Taylor] from *Kinder und Haus-Märchen* (London: C. Baldwin, 1823). For the significance of the Grimm's work in a discussion on Gaelic collecting, see, William Gillies, 'A Century of Gaelic Scholarship', in *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus a' Ghàidhlig*, ed. by William Gillies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 3–21 (6–7); Black, 'Context and Controversy', in Stiùbhart, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 57–58.

³⁶ She refers on more than one occasion to Campbell's work in 'Some of Cailleach Bheur's Kindred', *Myth, Tradition and Story*, 13–19.

³⁷ See chapter 5, 156.

one blood all nations!’ We find the same myths, the same stories, the same beliefs everywhere, though clothed in different garb, as varied as those of the nations and countries and climates in which they occur.³⁸

The legend of the ‘Cailleach Bheur’ was her particular interest and she discussed it in detail in Gaelic and English in *Aig Tigh na Beinne*³⁹ and in *Myth, Tradition and Story*.⁴⁰ In relating the ‘haunts of the Cailleach’, she highlights her own Argyll, or more specifically Lorne, tradition while admitting that there were similar topographical references ‘all over the west and north of Scotland’.⁴¹

Katherine Whyte Grant provides a personal memoir of her childhood in Appin across three chapters in *Myth, Tradition and Story*, in which she covers people and place-names, old cures, food, wool-work and story-telling. However, she was also able to go back a further two generations in ‘Duilleag A Linn Mo Sheanamhar’,⁴² of which she remarked: ‘gach pung mar a dh’innseadh leatha fhein’. This account by her grandmother⁴³ was reprised as ‘Peasant Life in Lorn in the End of the Eighteenth Century’ in *Myth, Tradition and Story*,⁴⁴ although with considerable variation in the content. Like Mary MacKellar, she also gives prominence to female domestic contexts, including the waulking process and the life of the sheiling.

Female work contexts were also the subject of a collection of Gaelic terms that Katherine Whyte Grant submitted for a Mòd competition in 1900. Covering wool-work, Highland housekeeping and dairy work, they were clearly considered by the judges as three separate collections and the first prize was awarded to the ‘technical terms’ connected with ‘calanas’ or wool-work.⁴⁵ In these collections she could draw not only on what she had heard from her grandmother, but also from her

³⁸ ‘Some of Cailleach Bheur’s Kindred’ in *Myth, Tradition and Story from Western Argyll*, 13–19 (13).

³⁹ K. W. G., ‘Cailleach Bheur’, *Aig Tigh na Beinne* (Oban: Hugh MacDonald, 1911), 129–139 (134).

⁴⁰ Grant, ‘The myth of Cailleach Bheur (The Winter Hag)’, 4–12 (8); and ‘Some of Cailleach Bheur’s Kindred’, 17–19, in *Myth, Tradition and Story*.

⁴¹ Grant, *Myth, Tradition and Story*, 8.

⁴² K. W. G., *Aig Tigh na Beinne*, 150–169.

⁴³ Her maternal grandmother, Catherine McCallum, b. 1774.

⁴⁴ Grant, *Myth, Tradition and Story*, 41–46.

⁴⁵ K. W. Grant refers to her collection of technical terms in a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane: ‘There was a lot of usable stuff in my ‘Technical Terms’ essay, of some years ago; Only the ‘Wool-work’ section was published; There were Highland housekeeping, and Dairy Work included’. This essay was not returned and she therefore lost a lot of work which could perhaps have been published elsewhere. See NLS Acc. 9736/43

mother, who, as well as being a singer, was described as having ‘a natural aptitude for and a wide knowledge of the Gaelic language’.⁴⁶ The lexical collections were not just motivated by the Mòd competition; Katherine Whyte Grant had a real interest in Gaelic words and terminology, particularly those that were in danger of going out of use through changing social contexts. She also, however, recognised that if Gaelic was to have a place in the modern world, there would be a need for new words to accommodate new situations:

Tha iomadh facal a’ dol à cleachduinn; tha iomadh ainm àite a chaillear gu sìorruidh mur teid aon éiginn g’an trusadh, ’s an cur sìos an òrdugh. [...] [T]ha facail ùra ri chùinneadh a chum cothrom labhairt ’sa Ghàidhlig air nith ’sam bith a ghabhas bruidhinn no sgrìobhadh ann an cànan eile.⁴⁷

While it would appear that the degree of formal collecting undertaken by Katherine Whyte Grant and Mary MacKellar was small, they were acutely alert to the importance of recollecting and preserving their own oral traditions of Argyll and Lochaber respectively in the changing cultural dynamic of these areas at the end of the nineteenth century. This was a sentiment that was also a strong motivation underpinning the collecting interests of Frances Tolmie.

Frances Tolmie (1840–1926)

A deeply felt understanding of the importance of oral tradition in maintaining the ‘deep’ knowledge of a specific place was a tangible presence in Frances Tolmie’s relationship with the songs and lore of her home area in the west of Skye. As a tacksman’s daughter,⁴⁸ she was born into a relative degree of privilege, certainly compared to most of the families who lived around her. Her family, however, retained a strong connection with their Gaelic heritage, and although the role of tacksman came to an end in her father’s generation, Frances Tolmie retained a sense of the loyalty of the tacksman to people and place. This and other contexts relating to her gender, class and social circumstances influenced her initial interest in collecting,

⁴⁶ ‘The Late Mrs K. W. Grant, Oban’, *OT*, 25 Aug 1928. Her mother was Mary McIsaac (1817–1899).

⁴⁷ Catriona W. G[h]rannd, ‘Na Cunnartan a tha ’bagradh na Gàidhlig’, *DG*, 1 (1905–06), 10–12, 36–38, 45–47.

⁴⁸ The daughter, grand-daughter and great-granddaughter of successive tacksmen to MacLeod of Dunvegan.

while the interaction of different collecting and Gaelic networks facilitated the opportunity to finally have her collection published.

Through her Tolmie and MacAskill forebears, Frances Tolmie was connected to the Clan MacLeod as far back as the earliest chiefs, and in particular to MacLeod of Dunvegan.⁴⁹ Both families were rooted in the western part of Skye that encompasses the districts of Duirinish, Bracadale and Minginish, but also with connections to Eigg, and further back to Coll. Importantly, however, her family were still Gaelic-speaking at a time when the Highland land-owning classes were becoming increasingly anglicised. Like Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant, Frances Tolmie experienced songs around her from her earliest years. She highlighted this in her reminiscences, stating that: ‘My acquaintance with our native Gaelic poetry and music began with my life, and old songs are amongst my earliest recollections’,⁵⁰ referring not just to her mother’s songs but also to the songs of the local women who were part of her ‘big house’ upbringing. It was predominantly in female domestic contexts that she gathered songs throughout her life, with the exception of a gap of some twenty-three years when she was in England, firstly for two terms at Newham College, Cambridge and then as a lady’s companion in the Lake District.⁵¹ Her father died in 1844, leaving her mother, at the age of thirty six, a widow with nine of a family, recently declared bankrupt, and now homeless.⁵² Margaret Tolmie’s brother Hugh MacAskill at nearby Talisker took the family under his roof, and shortly afterwards, he got the tacks of Rubha an Dùnain⁵³ and Glenbrittle in the Minginish district of Skye.⁵⁴ It was here in the shadow of the Cuillin that Frances Tolmie spent her formative years – between the age of five and

⁴⁹ ‘Extracts re The MacAskills from letters of Mr John MacKenzie, factor, Dunvegan, to Canon MacLeod of MacLeod’, Personal Papers; Rev. Donald MacKinnon, ‘The MacAskills of Rudha An Dunain’, *Clan MacLeod Magazine*, 17 (1951), 22–27; I. F. Grant, *The MacLeods: The History of a Clan* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 62 & 593; Lucy E. Broadwood, ‘Introduction’, *JFSS*, 16 (1911), v–xiv.

⁵⁰ Frances Tolmie, ‘Notes and Reminiscences’, *JFSS*, 16 (1911) 143–146 (143).

⁵¹ Frances Tolmie refers to the latter situation as ‘an illuminating atmosphere’ in ‘Reminiscences’, Appendix D in Ethel Bassin, *The Old Songs of Skye: Frances Tolmie and her Circle* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 197–199 (199). Ethel Bassin provides more detail on this period in *The Old Songs of Skye*, 61–75.

⁵² Margaret Tolmie, Uiginish to Barbara MacDonald, 12 Jan 1844. GD403/65/15.

⁵³ ‘Rubha [or Rubh] an Dùnain’ is the spelling in current Gaelic orthography; the original spelling and its variations are kept in any quotations.

⁵⁴ Hugh MacAskill is named in connection with evictions in Bracadale at this time. See Alexander MacKenzie, *The Isle of Skye in 1882–1883* (Inverness: A & W MacKenzie, 1883), xx–xxvii.

twelve. It was a district somewhat off the beaten track, and where the waulking process, or *luadh*, was still taking place:

At *Rudh' n-dùnain*, over in Minginish, there used to be waulkings at intervals, accompanied by loud singing of many voices in Chorus; and we children used to listen with pleasure; acting the scene afterwards in our own playground.⁵⁵

From this remark, the waulking must have been a fairly frequent occurrence in the district and this is further confirmed in one of Frances Tolmie's song notebooks⁵⁶ where the song *Chaidh na Fir a Sgathabheig* is annotated as: 'Always sung at the "Waulkings" at Rù-an-Dùnain, 1845, with great energy by Catriona Mhòr'.⁵⁷ Frances Tolmie was just five years old in 1845 and she was therefore present at waulkings from an early age and they clearly left a strong impression on her.

When Frances Tolmie's brother, the Rev. John Tolmie (1831–1886), became the parish minister for Bracadale in 1856, she moved with him, along with her mother and sister, to the manse at Struan. It was here in her late teens and early twenties that Frances Tolmie's interest in the songs became more than just a natural attachment to the singing tradition that had always been around her. This interest may have developed anyway, but it was given impetus by the difference she perceived in Bracadale in comparison to what she had experienced at Rudh' an Dùnain, with regard to the role of song in the life of the community. In particular, the waulking was no longer taking place, and the encroachment of the English language and modern ways was also weakening the song tradition: 'When I lived in Bracadale [...] [t]he younger women even then were becoming dull – inwardly – and outwardly imitating new smart ways – and mixing English words with their ordinary speech – following the fashion'.⁵⁸ As the Statistical Account of 1834–45 for the adjacent parish of Duirinish notes that: 'the great majority of the young women go [to the Lowlands] annually during the harvest season', this fact would partly account for the infiltration of English words referred to above; in addition the area where the manse was situated, was on the main parliamentary road and would have been more

⁵⁵ Tolmie, 'Reminiscences', *Old Songs of Skye*, 197.

⁵⁶ NLS MS 14903, fo. 54.

⁵⁷ Catriona Mhòr: Catherine (Kate) MacDiarmid (c.1814–1890), Carbost.

⁵⁸ NLS MS 14904, fo. 74.

exposed to outside influence in general than was the case in Rubh' an Dùnain.⁵⁹ Further, the Statistical Account remarks on the fact that the custom of 'whiling away the long winter evenings in reciting tales and traditions, singing songs, or playing musical instruments [...] is completely given up'.⁶⁰ It is clear, however, from the oral tradition and songs that have survived that this was not entirely the case, but Frances Tolmie was certainly aware that 'a great change had come over Bracadale within the preceding generation',⁶¹ and with the waulking in particular no longer taking place, the loss of something that had been a vital cultural component of her childhood and an important means of keeping the songs alive in the community. This was a poignant thought for a young woman sensitive to the song tradition and to the culture embedded within it, and a powerful motivation to learn and indeed to preserve the songs that she remembered sung by the women at the waulking-board. As a result she 'begged' her mother to teach her the old songs that she had known in her youth,⁶² and it is clear that it was learning the songs that was important to Frances Tolmie at this time.

Twenty-two of the songs published in her collection are marked as 'early or nursery recollections' and frequently the tag 'revived at Bracadale Manse' is also added. These were the songs Frances Tolmie had heard sung to her as a child and which she later had the opportunity to hear again when her mother sang the same songs to a new generation of Tolmie children.⁶³ Four of her mother's songs in the collection go back to an earlier generation in Eigg, and one of the Eigg songs in turn goes back another generation to the island of Coll, the home of Frances' great grandmother, Mary MacLean; these were songs that were passed naturally from mother to daughter through at least four generations. Another source for songs within her immediate family was Frances Tolmie's paternal aunt, Annabella MacKenzie. Thus it is clear that songs were being passed down within the female tradition on both sides of the family.

⁵⁹ The Statistical Accounts of Scotland, Account of 1834–1845, Duirinish, County of Inverness', vol. 14, 347.

<<http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Inverness/Duirinish/14/358/>>[Accessed 14 Oct 2011]

⁶⁰ Ibid., 359. The report was compiled by Rev. Archibald Clerk.

⁶¹ Frances Tolmie, 'Notes and Reminiscences', *JFSS*, 16 (1911), 143–149 (143).

⁶² Tolmie, 'Notes and Reminiscences', 143.

⁶³ Rev. John Tolmie's first two children were born in the Bracadale Manse. When he transferred to Contin, in Ross-shire, the Tolmie women accompanied him, and by 1871 there were six young children in the Manse, (Scotland's People: 1871 Census), providing Frances Tolmie with ample opportunity to add to the Cradle and Nurse's Songs that form the largest section in her collection.

The Rev. John Tolmie also had an interest in Gaelic song and Frances Tolmie wrote that when ‘the worthy schoolmaster, Mr MacIntyre, came to spend an evening at the Manse’, her brother would read aloud or sing to him from the poetry of Alexander MacDonald and Duncan Bàn MacIntyre. These were songs from a literary and male repertoire and did not attract Frances as did the ‘old wives’ songs [...] that were not deemed “poetry” or worthy of notice by song-collectors of that period’.⁶⁴ One of the five songs from Frances Tolmie in the manuscript collection of the American song-collector Amy Murray, is annotated: ‘As sung to the Rev. John Tolmie of Bracadale by Ewan Cameron, Tacksman of Talisker, Skye, 1856’.⁶⁵ When Alexander Carmichael came to work at the distillery at Carbost as an exciseman in 1860,⁶⁶ he lodged with Ewan Cameron, and as there was evidently social interaction between the Manse and Talisker House, it is not surprising that the paths of the young Frances Tolmie and Carmichael crossed. She wrote of this meeting:

In those days – 1860–62 – in Bracadale, or over in Minginish when on a visit to my early home under the Coolin range, I occasionally met Dr. Alex. Carmichael, (editor and translator of *Carmina Gadelica*), who encouraged my interest in the old songs, and advised me to note down the tunes to them.⁶⁷

It is clear from the above that Carmichael stressed in particular that she should note down the tunes. He himself was not musically literate and would have recognised the collecting potential of someone who not only had knowledge of music notation, but was also a Gaelic-speaker and a singer. Frances Tolmie’s education had been in the form of the home-tutored lessons deemed appropriate to a woman of her class – a limited curriculum in many ways, but which included music and piano lessons.⁶⁸ She remarked in later life on the fact that some collectors did not have this skill:

In the Celtic Review Mr Kenneth MacLeod often gives pieces of poetry, or poetical prose from Eigg – but he does not give the music

⁶⁴ Tolmie, ‘Notes and Reminiscences’, 146.

⁶⁵ NLS Acc. 9711/3/2, fo.39. For more on Ewan Cameron, and Carmichael’s stay with him see <<http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2010/10/carmichaels-in-census-i.html>> [accessed 24 Jan 2013]

⁶⁶ The Carbost Distillery was established, c. 1830, by Frances Tolmie’s maternal uncles, Hugh and Kenneth MacAskill.

⁶⁷ Tolmie, ‘Notes and Reminiscences’, 144.

⁶⁸ Tolmie, ‘Reminiscences’, in Bassin, *Old Songs of Skye*, 198.

that should go with these things – nor to his deep regret, can Mr Carmichael.⁶⁹

A second important influence on Frances Tolmie in this period was Emily MacLeod of MacLeod (1810–1896), who also had an interest in the songs and lore of the district.⁷⁰ In 1855, Emily MacLeod obtained a contract from the government for the knitting of a thousand pairs of socks for British soldiers taking part in the Crimean War.⁷¹ This philanthropic enterprise continued beyond that particular conflict and Frances Tolmie was approached to oversee the distribution of wool and the collecting of the finished goods. At the time there was a ‘surplus’ of Tolmie women; with Frances, her mother, and her sister Mary all living in the Bracadale Manse where there was also house staff to cover the various home duties, and when John Tolmie married and the three Tolmie women moved to a house not far away at Ebost, they also had a domestic servant. Emily MacLeod possibly recognised that Frances Tolmie was in need of an active role outside her domestic situation, and indeed the younger woman accepted the opportunity ‘willingly’.⁷² Her mother, however, insisted that her daughter should have company as she walked between the various hamlets in often isolated districts and it was in this way that Frances Tolmie came to spend long periods in the company of Oighrig Ross, and at Ebost with Margaret Gillies:

I always had as my escort – either Oibhrig Ros – or Mairearad bheag nigh’n Domhnuill ’ic Ruaraidh – both elderly – and most interesting and willing to sing all the way to their young associate – and tell old-world tales.⁷³

Oighrig, or Effie, Ross (1806–1876), a native of Waternish, although brought up in Bracadale, lived alone in a cottage on the manse glebe in Struan. While the official records, in their clinical way, identify her as an unmarried pauper, a local man, Alexander Nicolson, in his monthly publication of the 1950s, *The Clarion of Skye*,

⁶⁹ Frances Tolmie, 37 Merchiston Crescent, Edinburgh to Winifred Parker, 17 July [1908]. Copies in Papers of Miss Rose Ethel Bassin, NLS Acc. 7040/11.

⁷⁰ Sister of Norman, 25th chief of MacLeod. She took over the running of the estate when her brother was forced to find work in London after he was financially ruined through his efforts to provide for his tenants during the potato harvest failure of 1846–47. See Grant, *The MacLeods*, 584–586.

⁷¹ Emily MacLeod of MacLeod, Edinburgh to Mrs Hector MacKenzie, [Frances Tolmie’s aunt, Annabella] Dunvegan, 2 Jan 1855. NAS GD403/67/18. See also Grant, 586 & 594.

⁷² Tolmie, ‘Notes and Reminiscences’, *JFSS*, 144.

⁷³ NLS MS 1493, fo.74.

gives a local perspective: ‘As I heard it from my father, [Miss Tolmie’s] collection of folklore had been immensely added to, by her association with Effie Ross, who also was a remarkable woman’.⁷⁴ The songs learned from Oighrig Ross included ‘Là Millegàraidh’, a song from her home-district of Waternish,⁷⁵ and also ‘Òran Mu ’n Ghruagaich’ which she connected to Glen MacAskill in Bracadale,⁷⁶ illustrating the interconnection of song, singer and place that Frances Tolmie was particularly sensitive to. It is worth noting that although the knitting project work must have brought Frances Tolmie into contact with many women who would have been able to give her songs, she did not follow this formal collecting option. This suggests that she wanted to learn and memorise the songs, extending her knowledge of the tradition in a way that was organic rather than as an objective task. The context of her long walks in the company of Oighrig Ross allowed her to do this in a companionable way that was enjoyable for both women. When she moved to Ebost, Frances Tolmie’s companion on her rounds for the knitting project was Margaret Gillies - ‘Mairearad bheag, nigh’n Domhnuill ’ic Ruairidh’ - a woman of similar circumstance and age to Oighrig Ross,⁷⁷ and with an equally rich song repertoire. When Frances Tolmie returned from England c.1895, and lived with her sister Mary, first in Oban, and then from 1905 in Edinburgh, their mother having died in 1889, Mary Ross – (Màiri Rànuill),⁷⁸ a native of Kilmaluag in the north of Skye – was their domestic servant, although without the implied hierarchy of the position. She provided thirty-six out of the one hundred and five songs in the published collection, by far the largest contribution from one singer, and she was an important partner in what was the second phase of Frances Tolmie’s song-gathering.

⁷⁴ Alexander Nicolson, *Clarion of Skye*, 18 July 1952.

⁷⁵ The Battle of Millegàraidh is said to have taken place in Waternish in 1570 between the MacLeods of Skye and Harris and the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald, and was remembered in particular in the district as the last occasion in which the Fairy Flag was unfurled, bringing the victory to the MacLeods. The story was still in the oral tradition in the 1950s when I. F. Grant heard it from Donald Beaton of Stein, possibly a relation of Oighrig Ross, whose mother’s name was Catherine Beaton. See Grant, *The MacLeods*, 136–139; See also Wilson McLeod and Meg Bateman, eds, *Duanaire na Sracaire* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007), 466–470, & 525. A description of the battle is also given in the New Stat. Account 1834–45 for Duirinish, 329–330. See note 59, above.

⁷⁶ See *JFSS*, 16 (1911), 197–198 and 200–201.

⁷⁷ Margaret Gillies, b. 1811.

⁷⁸ Mary Ross, Màiri Rànuill, (1841–1926), daughter of Ronald Ross and Dorcas MacKinnon, Killmaluag, Skye.

Frances Tolmie found Oban ‘more Lowland than Highland’,⁷⁹ and she must, therefore, have relished a chance to renew her friendship with Alexander Carmichael, when she discovered that he and his wife were living in the nearby village of Taynuilt.⁸⁰ It was while visiting them there in 1900 that Frances Tolmie met the scholar Dr George Henderson (1866–1912),⁸¹ and she recalled that ‘in the course of conversation, and after I had been singing some “Puirt-a-Beul”, both friends expressed a wish that I would write down all the tunes I remembered’.⁸² This task was undertaken over the next two years, with the help of Mary Ross. The two women worked closely together in compiling the collection, a partnership ‘of two friends’ as Frances Tolmie acknowledged in the Preface to the collection. Although the manuscript notebooks were given to Dr Henderson sometime in 1903,⁸³ it was to be another five years before anything further was done towards their publication. In George Henderson’s defence, he had plenty other literary and professional irons in the fire during this period, but it would seem that the initial delay was the proposed Gaelic Texts Society under discussion at the time, with a collection of waulking songs being mooted as its first volume.⁸⁴ By the beginning of 1904, the planned Gaelic Texts Society had been abandoned in favour of a new scholarly periodical, *The Celtic Review*, launched in the summer of the same year. Henderson himself, however, offered his own explanation for the time lapse:

[The Collection] was committed to my care to do with it as I saw fit but I refrained from giving it to anyone as a paper for I held it a sacred trust from [Miss Tolmie] herself. Many folks would be glad to cull the cream of the collection and simply add a note of thanks to her at the foot.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Tolmie, ‘Notes and Reminiscences’, 16 (1911), 146.

⁸⁰ c1899–1900.

⁸¹ The meeting can probably be dated to September, 1900, from evidence in a letter from Alexander Carmichael to Father Allan in which he mentions that they were expecting a visit from ‘Mr Henderson [...] on his way from Morven to Edinburgh’. Alexander Carmichael, Taynuilt, to Father Allan McDonald, 21 Sept 1900. Canna House Letters.

⁸² Tolmie, ‘Notes and Reminiscences’, *JFSS*, 146.

⁸³ This date is based on a comment by George Henderson in a letter to Miss Winifred Parker in 1908 where he writes ‘I have been looking for five years for a suitable place for [the Collection]’. Lucy Broadwood Letters, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.

⁸⁴ See chapter 5, 167.

⁸⁵ George Henderson, Glasgow, to Winifred Parker, 29 Nov 1908. Lucy Broadwood Letters, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.

It is perhaps not surprising that George Henderson was leaning towards the ultra-cautious with regard to the manuscript given that he had so recently witnessed the collection of his friend, Father Allan, freely made use of by Ada Goodrich Freer.⁸⁶ In the end, it was from outwith the Gaelic community that a publishing opportunity emerged and under the editorial supervision of women from a quite different collecting background. However, the link in the chain of communications was Winifred Parker who, as discussed in chapter 2, was one of the women active in An Comunn Gàidhealach in the early 1900s.⁸⁷ As a member of the London-based Folk-Song Society, Winifred Parker was acquainted with a similarly active group of middle and upper-class women in that Society, including the collector and musician Lucy Broadwood (1858–1929).⁸⁸ Lucy Broadwood had undertaken some song-collecting in Arisaig during the summers of 1906 and 1907, and approached Winifred Parker regarding a suitable person to transcribe the Gaelic texts. When Winifred Parker was having Gaelic lessons from George Henderson in Sutherland in 1907, she asked his advice on the matter, and he suggested Frances Tolmie. In the context of this particular conversation, a possible publishing opportunity for the Skyewoman's collection presented itself.⁸⁹ By November of 1908, George Henderson had clearly put the suggestion to Frances Tolmie, writing in a letter to Winifred Parker that:

Miss Tolmie felt it was the correct way of preserving her collection to bring it out in the Folk-Song Society publication. Accordingly under her own name I should wish it to appear. I will add a few words of introduction to let it be seen that it was done independently of any other view than a bona-fide transcript from the folk.⁹⁰

Dr Henderson's eagerness to highlight the issue of authenticity was perhaps a reaction to the doubts that were already at large regarding the editing of some of Alexander Carmichael's texts; concern regarding the polish of 'book learning' on

⁸⁶ See John Lorne Campbell, *A Very Civil People: Hebridean Folk, History and Tradition*, ed. by Hugh Cheape (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), 67–80; John L. Campbell and Trevor Hall, *Strange Things* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006 [1968]).

⁸⁷ See chapter 2, 36–37.

⁸⁸ See Lucy E. Broadwood, 'Twenty Gaelic Songs', *JFSS*, 8:35 (1931), 280–303.

⁸⁹ Winifred Parker, Fairlie, Ayrshire to Ethel Bassin, 23 June 1953. NLS Acc.7040 /11.

⁹⁰ George Henderson, Glasgow, to Winifred Parker, 29 Nov 1908. Lucy Broadwood Letters, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.

oral texts was certainly in the air at the time.⁹¹ He was also being somewhat presumptuous, or proprietorial perhaps, in his statement that he would ‘add a few words of introduction’, given that Lucy Broadwood, who had edited the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* since 1904, was in charge of the editorial committee. If it was not entirely serendipity that brought Frances Tolmie’s manuscript to the attention of the Folk-Song Society and into the sympathetic and experienced editorial hands of Lucy Broadwood and Annie G. Gilchrist it proved a fortunate meeting of like-minded women.

Frances Tolmie’s ‘Collection of one hundred and five songs of Occupation from the Western Isles of Scotland’ was published in the *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* in December 1911, distributed free of charge to members of the Society. This in itself was an important achievement, introducing Gaelic songs to an audience who were interested in and knowledgeable about the folk-songs of other traditions, and thus making a claim for Gaelic song alongside the other folk-song traditions of Britain. On the other hand, however, the *Journal* was not available for general purchase outwith the Folk-Song Society membership and this may have contributed to the fact that it is only comparatively recently that Frances Tolmie’s work has been given the attention it deserves.⁹²

Alexander Carmichael’s timely encouragement of Frances Tolmie in her collecting provided an important endorsement of her work as well as an initial impetus towards its publication, and when their paths crossed in Skye, Argyll and later in Edinburgh, all evidence suggests a warm and loyal friendship. Indeed Frances Tolmie’s move from Oban to Edinburgh in 1905 may possibly have been influenced by the fact that Alexander Carmichael and his wife Mary changed their mind about settling in Taynuilt, and returned to the city.⁹³ In Edinburgh, Frances Tolmie was part of a close circle of Gaels, including the Carmichaels, Donald MacKinnon and the Skye poet, Neil MacLeod, all of a similar generation and who shared memories and ideals of an earlier period. Although these are all well-known

⁹¹ See Donald E. Meek, ‘Faking the ‘True Gael’?: *Carmina Gadelica* and the Beginning of Modern Gaelic Scholarship’ in *Aiste* 1, (2007), 76–106; and Ronald Black, ‘I thought he made it all up: Context and Controversy’, in Stiùbhart, *The Life & Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, 57–81.

⁹² In 1911 there were only three members of the Society listed in Scotland, apart from public and university libraries.

⁹³ The Carmichaels lived in Edinburgh from 1882, but around 1899 were considering settling in Taynuilt where they were in the habit of taking a holiday house.

male figures in the Gaelic world, their Gaelic-speaking wives⁹⁴ would have equally been a part of any social interaction, and a supportive female community with shared cultural roots most probably existed between these households. In contrast, the formality of middle-class social etiquette in the city was not Frances Tolmie's style, as is clear from a letter she sent to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser: 'We live in our own island manner as we did at Oban – and have no "At Home" day, but always pleased to see our Friends when they come to us'.⁹⁵

For Mary MacKellar, Katherine Whyte Grant and Frances Tolmie, their collecting or recollecting of Gaelic songs and lore reflected their particular knowledge and close attachment to the oral tradition, community and place of their upbringing as women and as Gaelic-speakers. As a result, their relationship to the tradition and their approach to collecting differed from that of the group of women who came to collect Gaelic songs on the wave of Celtic Revival interest and for whom their lack of Gaelic was a fundamental disadvantage. This difficulty was addressed by working in collaboration with a Gaelic-speaker, and it is the dynamics of these relationships, the different motivations of the women involved, and their interaction with the wider Gaelic movement that are discussed next.

Women and Collecting Collaborations

The particular challenge that collectors of Gaelic song faced if they did not speak the language was highlighted by the American collector Amy Murray (1865–1947): 'One may, of course, set down the tunes without the words; but never so fully, to my way of thinking, for want of the delicate syllables to guide the ear'.⁹⁶ In this way, as her comment indicates, not only were text and tune separated, but the way in which the tune accommodated the Gaelic words was also lost. The problem was overcome to a certain extent with the advent of recording equipment, when words and music could both be transcribed at a later date, although the poor quality of the recordings achieved with the first portable machines did not always allow accurate textual transcription.

⁹⁴ The female element in Donald MacKinnon's household, for example, in 1911, was his wife, sister-in-law and a female domestic servant, all Gaelic-speakers from Colonsay, and in addition his two daughters in their thirties also spoke Gaelic.

⁹⁵ Frances Tolmie to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, [No Date]. NLS MS 14909/6.

⁹⁶ Amy Murray, *Father Allan's Island* (Edinburgh & London: The Moray Press, 1936 [New York, 1920]), 127.

In the summer of 1905, three women with an interest in collecting songs made their way to the island of Eriskay.⁹⁷ They were inspired in their quest by the ideology of the Celtic Revival, a desire to collect the songs of ‘the most natural, genuine, and uncorrupted people’,⁹⁸ dwellers in a ‘Celtic’ arcadia that was untouched by the modern world: ‘no fences, no roads, [...] no carts, no wheelbarrows even’,⁹⁹ the ‘Edge of the World’¹⁰⁰ in fact. The Scottish singer and musician Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857–1943) arrived ‘at the beginning of August’,¹⁰¹ and was followed by two American musicians, Evelyn Benedict from Boston and Amy Murray from New York. The American women were known to each other but travelling independently, and while it does not seem to be the case that the three visitors overlapped,¹⁰² they must certainly have all followed very close on each other’s heels. Another attraction of Eriskay was that the parish priest, Father Allan McDonald, who despite his relatively young age, already had a considerable reputation as a folklorist, collector, poet and Gaelic scholar. Apart from his scholarly knowledge, he also knew the islanders and their ways, and could therefore act as a cultural intermediary between the English-speaking women, with their middle-class clothes and strange accents, and the Gaelic-speaking singers and tradition-bearers on the island. Amy Murray stayed with Father Allan during the six weeks she was in Eriskay and it is clear that they began a collecting collaboration, although this was ultimately short-lived. It is possible that Evelyn Benedict also stayed with the priest on her visit as the twenty-nine ‘Luaidh Airs’ she collected were all noted from his housekeeper, Penny Campbell.¹⁰³ She did not take down any words for the songs, and simply noted in her manuscript – ‘Words in Father Allan’s Collection’.¹⁰⁴ Marjory Kennedy-Fraser came to Eriskay on the invitation of the artist John Duncan,¹⁰⁵ who had first visited the island the previous summer. She also separated melody from text in her collecting, as revealed in her somewhat blunt statement

⁹⁷ See chapter 4, 138.

⁹⁸ Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song* (Kershader: The Islands Book Trust, 2011 [1929]), 93.

⁹⁹ Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ Murray, *Father Allan’s Island*, vi.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song*, 81.

¹⁰² John L. Campbell, in countering an uncorroborated account that Father Allan ‘foresaw’ two ladies who visited Eriskay to collect ‘Highland music’, states that ‘there was no occasion on which two lady folk-musicians visited Eriskay together; all found their way separately to Eriskay in the summer of 1905 and at different times’. Campbell and Hall, *Strange Things*, 305–09.

¹⁰³ Ronald Black, *Eilein na h-Òige* (Glasgow: Mungo, 2002), 478.

¹⁰⁴ Black, *Eilein na h-Òige*, 478.

¹⁰⁵ See chapter 4, 137–138.

following her time in Eriskay: 'I had certainly brought home with me a good haul of tunes – others could collect and write down the Gaelic words. Father Allan was to send these after me'.¹⁰⁶ However, any future collaboration with Father Allan by any of the women was not to be, as two weeks after the last of the three (Amy Murray) left Eriskay, the priest was dead, succumbing to pneumonia in October 1905.

In her book, *Father Allan's Island*,¹⁰⁷ Amy Murray provides a personal account of the six weeks she spent in Eriskay, and in particular of her collecting collaboration with Father Allan. While it is clear that she benefited in her collecting from the priest's knowledge of Gaelic and Gaelic singing, he too had a need for someone who could competently transcribe the tunes of the songs he had collected: 'Tunes, for want of skill in music, he could do nothing with, though in his anxiety essaying a sort of Sol Fa of his own'.¹⁰⁸ The word 'anxiety' here suggests that the separation of text from tune was a concern, hence his makeshift notation. As already noted, this was a skill deficit in a number of male collectors, but even for those with the ability, accurately noting down the melodies of the songs from the 'folky way of singing' and often from elderly singers was not an easy task. Amy Murray describes how a singer could be 'thrown off' by her interrupting the flow or asking for a line to be repeated.¹⁰⁹ The fact that she had six weeks in which to collect was an advantage, allowing the possibility of hearing the same song more than once, but she also had daily contact with Penny Campbell, from whom Evelyn Benedict made her entire collection. The 'grey-eyed girl', as Amy Murray refers to her, sang as she worked around the priest's house and thus, over six weeks, Amy Murray had the opportunity to hear songs repeated and, more importantly, hear them when the singer was not consciously 'performing'.

Although coming to Gaelic culture as an outsider, Amy Murray's appreciation of the songs in context and the importance of undertaking her collecting with accuracy and care, was completely at one with Father Allan, who desired that their work should be of a standard that islanders themselves would be able to say: '*This* is the way of the tune as my mother was singing it under the cow, and my

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song*, 119.

¹⁰⁷ A number of the songs Amy Murray collected are in her book. Her manuscript collection is in NLS Acc. 9711, Box 3, Folders 1 and 2. See Nancy R. McGuire, 'Amy Murray's Eriskay Collection', *SGS*, 19 (1999), 83–92.

¹⁰⁸ Murray, *Father Allan's Island*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, *Father Allan's Island*, 116.

father in the boat, and the neighbours around our fire at *Céilidh*'.¹¹⁰ Once she had experienced the songs 'in the raw', she recognised that the singing 'with expression' that she had heard on the Mòd platform did not reflect what she found in the traditional context. This understanding was not perhaps the usual response from someone attuned to a different musical culture but it must have been a significant element in her empathetic collaboration with Father Allan.

By the time *Father Allan's Island* was first published in America in 1920, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser was well-known for her theatrical recitals based on her interpretation of 'Songs of the Hebrides'. There can be little doubt that it was to this that Amy Murray referred in her book when she wrote:

For the alien artist there are collections in which the home-spun melodies, arranged to well-contrived accompaniments, take on a gentility that sets them no ways ill – I'll say that much for them. If I feel them thereby in some measure robbed, as in some measure gifted, that's not to grudge any other one his pleasure in them. But....why put the songs in reach of all and sundry, and not one in a thousand with the folk-song sound in his voice? I say, leave them for the people.¹¹¹

On the basis of her first short visit to Eriskay in 1905, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser prepared a lecture-recital entitled 'Visit to the Outer Hebrides and Celtic Music' and for this she was under pressure to find texts for the tunes she had collected.¹¹² Alexander Carmichael helped her with some of the songs at this time but for some of the others she composed words herself.¹¹³ The positive response to her Celtic recital provided a strong motivation for further song collecting, and she returned to Eriskay in the summer of 1907, accompanied by her daughter Patuffa who was studying music in London.

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser was involved in Celtic Revival circles in Edinburgh, and overlapped with the Gaelic movement in the Celtic Union where she was drawn into the circle of the Carmichaels and others. In 1908 she brought her search for a Gaelic collaborator to the attention of Professor Donald MacKinnon, and he suggested the Rev. Dr Kenneth MacLeod (1871–1955), a Church of Scotland

¹¹⁰ Murray, *Father Allan's Island*, 133.

¹¹¹ Murray, *Father Allan's Island*, 129. Marjory Kennedy-Fraser performed her Hebridean Songs in New York towards the end of 1913.

¹¹² Performed in February 1907. See Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song*, 78.

¹¹³ Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song*, 120.

minister from Eigg, who from his earliest years had been steeped in Gaelic lore and had also collected a considerable amount of oral tradition. Initially Kenneth MacLeod was not very keen to take on the task but he was, according to MacLeod himself, persuaded otherwise by Professor MacKinnon and Ella Carmichael: ‘Thuir an t-Ollamh rium gum b’e mo dhleasdanas e, an dà chuid do na h-Eileanan agus do na Gàidheil. Thug Mrs. Watson a’ cheart chomhairle orm roimhe sin’.¹¹⁴ There may be an element of revisionism sneaking into this statement, but whatever his motives, Kenneth MacLeod had a creative collaboration with Marjory Kennedy Fraser that lasted for over twenty years and produced three volumes of *Songs of the Hebrides* between 1909 and 1921. In many ways it was an unlikely partnership. Marjory Kennedy-Fraser had a somewhat bohemian upbringing, touring all around the world with her family as musical performers, and she was a strong, independent woman, at a time when women were groomed as ladies to be modest and passive. In contrast, Kenneth MacLeod has been described as a ‘modest, self-effacing, almost diffident man. Small and slight physically, almost frail in appearance’.¹¹⁵ It may have been that he had initial doubts about the creative nature of the work, but that these dissipated as he became more comfortable in the collaboration and found he was able to create exactly the romantic nuance of word and expression that Marjory Kennedy-Fraser wanted. While this was very different to the spare language and stark realism of the originals, as Kenneth MacLeod well knew, he seems to have been able to completely separate the two in his mind.

Much has been written in criticism of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser’s work in the years since *Songs of the Hebrides* was first published, although some recent commentary, more informed on both the extent of her collecting and the context of her arranging has been more generous.¹¹⁶ She did not hide the fact that her purpose in her song-collecting was to source traditional Gaelic songs to ‘refashion’ into the art-song form that was in vogue at the time, stating: ‘This calls for great artistry, but the songs thus fashioned, while original, will still be racial in character.’¹¹⁷ However,

¹¹⁴ Coinneach MacLeòid, ‘Litir do Charaid’, in *Sgrìobhaidhean Choinnich MhicLeòid*, ed. by T. M. Murchison (Edinburgh: The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1988), 68–70 (68).

¹¹⁵ Murchison, *Sgrìobhaidhean Choinnich MhicLeòid*, i.

¹¹⁶ See Per G. L. Ahlander, ‘Introduction’, *A Life of Song* (South Lochs: The Islands Book Trust, 2011), v–xxiii.

¹¹⁷ Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, ‘Our Traditional Racial Song-Lore’, in *Voices from the Hills*, ed. by John MacDonald (Glasgow: An Comunn Gàidhealach, 1927), 31–34 (31).

the title ‘Songs of the Hebrides’ was misleading and could perhaps have been more accurately described as ‘Variations on Songs of the Hebrides’ or ‘Arrangements based on Songs of the Hebrides’. They were also performed in English with a Gaelic pastiche and aimed at an audience who knew little of Gaelic culture. At times Marjory Kennedy-Fraser’s comments reveal slight regard for her source material:

We preserve all the good lines, single words even, from the Gaelic originals, and pieces these together [...] In the many cases where there is something of value in the original, Kenneth lets it filter through his own mind and gets the essence of it sometimes [...] in a more beautiful form than in the original.¹¹⁸

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser met Frances Tolmie in Edinburgh in 1907, around the time of her first recital of ‘Songs of the Hebrides’, and she must have been delighted to discover that there was a source of Gaelic songs on her city doorstep. Not only Frances Tolmie, with her great knowledge of the song tradition, but there was also Mary Ross, who was still living with her. A number of songs were given by Frances Tolmie to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser and published in her collections, although often with text and tune ‘refashioned’.¹¹⁹ It is not known how Frances Tolmie viewed their publication in this way, and as it turned out, the originals were preserved in her own collection. However, her reaction to a performance of ‘Songs of the Hebrides’ in November 1909 is available in a letter she sent to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser:

Let me express in a few lines how much I was impressed at both your Recitals of our native melodies arranged according to the principles of Art. I listened with much pleasure as I recognised each familiar strain but at the same time with bewilderment, and a sense of my own profound ignorance of the region into which you were leading your audience. [...] Could you leap at one bound into all this inner meaning and exposition of our Hebridean life to which you have devoted your genius, without preliminary experience, however true one’s power of Intuition might be?¹²⁰

While the letter indicates a polite appreciation of the performance, particularly where she was able to recognise something of the original material, there is more than a

¹¹⁸ Kennedy-Fraser, *A Life of Song*, 109–110.

¹¹⁹ Some of these were acknowledged, while others, according to Ethel Bassin, were not. See Ethel Bassin, ‘The Debt of Mrs Kennedy Fraser to Frances Tolmie’, *TGSI*, 39/40 (1958), 334–349; also Bassin, *Old Songs of Skye*, 127–143.

¹²⁰ Frances Tolmie to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, 30 Nov 1909. NLS MS 14909/6.

hint of ambivalence with regard to the performance as a whole. Her choice of the word ‘bewildered’ suggests that she struggled to connect with what she heard, and the rhetorical question regarding ‘all this inner meaning and exposition of our Hebridean life’ is remarkably pointed.

Although Marjory Kennedy-Fraser wrote, after Frances Tolmie’s death, that: ‘Unable to add an instrumental accompaniment to the airs recovered, [Miss Tolmie] warmly approved of my work in that direction’,¹²¹ the truth was that Frances Tolmie preferred the tunes transcribed simply and ‘just as [she] heard them sung’. She was quite scathing about the treatment of songs published in *The Gesto Collection*, which Keith Norman Macdonald had ‘fitted and badly enough with piano accompaniments’.¹²² Marjory Kennedy-Fraser did, however, fully recognise the importance of Frances Tolmie’s collection and understood that as a ‘born Isles-woman’ she had the ‘insight and the culture necessary [...] to the discovery, appreciation and notation of what had been overlooked in the traditional music-lore of the Isles’.¹²³ It is therefore greatly on the credit side of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser’s Gaelic collecting that she made a number of recordings of Frances Tolmie – ‘singing into my phonograph the melodies she loved best’¹²⁴ – and that over a hundred years later it is possible to hear these songs as they were sung in the singer’s native ‘MacLeod Country’ in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In concluding this section, brief comment needs to be made on two other women who collected Gaelic song and lore in this period. As was noted earlier,¹²⁵ Lucy Broadwood made a collection of Gaelic songs in Arisaig in 1906 and 1907.¹²⁶ In correspondence with Malcolm MacFarlane on the subject, she revealed her understanding of the challenge she faced in collecting from a song tradition and language with which she was not familiar:

¹²¹ ‘The Late Miss Frances Tolmie’, Letter from Marjory Kennedy-Fraser to The Editor, *OT*, 8 Jan 1927.

¹²² Frances Tolmie to Lucy Broadwood, 24 Nov 1914. Copy in NLS Acc.7040/9.

¹²³ Marjory Kennedy-Fraser to The Editor, *OT*, 8 Jan 1927.

¹²⁴ Marjory Kennedy-Fraser to The Editor, *OT*, 8 Jan 1927.

¹²⁵ See p. 195.

¹²⁶ See Lucy E. Broadwood, Frank Howes, A. G. Gilchrist and Martin Freeman, ‘Twenty Gaelic Songs’, *JFSS*, 8:35 (1931), 280–303; Lucy E. Broadwood, ‘Ten Gaelic Folk Songs’, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1:1 (1932), 42–51; Lucy E. Broadwood, ‘Eleven Gaelic Folk Songs’, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, 1:2 (1933), 89–96.

Let me hasten to say that my excursions into Gaelic song collecting have been made with full consciousness of my powerlessness to cope with the matter thoroughly. All I could do was to trust my ear for accents etc. that might appear quite other to one who understands Gaelic.¹²⁷

Another of her letters highlights the contrasting lives of collector and singer – the lady of leisure and the working woman: ‘Here are the songs lately noted from Kate McLean nr Arisaig. I could have got much more from her, but she was very busy weaving, washing and attending to lodgers so could spare only a few hours’.¹²⁸ The same letter points to the weakening of the oral tradition in that district, forcing a reliance on written texts, noting that ‘Kate MacLean refreshes her memory with various anthologies of Gaelic poetry, and so often when singing to the phonograph (where following printed words was impossible) had to hum. (as I have indicated)’.¹²⁹ Frances Tolmie provided some texts and translations for the songs that Lucy Broadwood collected in Arisaig, and the Skyewoman’s sensitivity to the distinctive tradition of a particular place is again emphasised in her comment that: ‘Not having lived in Lochaber I have little local knowledge of its songs and place-names’.¹³⁰ Lucy Broadwood’s Arisaig collecting trips and the surviving recordings is a subject that requires more detailed research.

The collection of another notable female collector of Gaelic lore in this period has only very recently been published. Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray (1868–1940), the third and youngest daughter of the 7th Duke of Atholl, made a remarkable collection of Gaelic stories and songs from the area around her Perthshire home in 1891.¹³¹ Her mother, the Duchess Louisa, strongly disapproved of this interest necessitating, as it did, visiting the homes of the humblest of the estate tenants: ‘I like you to go amongst the country people, if you do so for the sake of their good,

¹²⁷ Lucy Broadwood to Malcolm MacFarlane, 8 Jan 1907. NLS Acc.7040/1.

¹²⁸ Lucy Broadwood to Malcolm MacFarlane, 8 Aug 1907. NLS Acc.7040/1.

¹²⁹ Lucy Broadwood to Malcolm MacFarlane, 8 Aug 1907. NLS Acc.7040/1.

¹³⁰ Frances Tolmie to Lucy Broadwood, 24 March [1908]. Copy in NLS Acc.7040/12.

¹³¹ The story of Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray and her remarkable collection has been researched in detail by Sylvia Robertson, published first in Sylvia Robertson and Patricia Young, *Daughter of Atholl* (Abertay Historical Society, 1996), reprinted 1997, and by Atholl Publishing, 2007. In 2009, the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society published Lady Evelyn’s complete collection, *Tales from Highland Perthshire*, translated and edited by Sylvia Robertson and Tony Dilworth, which includes an extended biography and extensive Notes on the collection.

but remember that it is equally your duty to associate with your equals'.¹³² There, it seems, was the crux of the matter; collecting overstepped the acceptable social boundaries for visiting the homes of the lower classes, and implied a form of role-reversal. This was something that the Irish collector and writer, Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), commented on in relation to her own collecting forays amongst the tenants on her estate at Coole:

She had lived among the people all her life [...] but she had known them from without, as an improver, a social worker, a daughter of the Big House. Now she was to start all over again, going to them as learner not as teacher.¹³³

Lady Evelyn suffered from a depressive disorder similar to anorexia,¹³⁴ possibly connected to the intellectually limiting role imposed on her by the conventions of her gender and class, and by the end of her exhausting collecting marathon in 1891, she became totally withdrawn and at odds with her family until eventually she was sent to recover on the continent. She did not return to her Perthshire home until the very last months of her life, almost fifty years later.¹³⁵

Lady Evelyn's elder sister, Lady Helen Stewart Murray, was involved with An Comunn Gàidhealach, as noted in chapter 2,¹³⁶ but while she took her place on the Executive of that Society and was involved with her local branch, she was never outspoken or involved in any An Comunn friction, thus keeping within approved class and gender conventions. Lady Elspeth Campbell, likewise, in her association with An Comunn Gàidhealach kept within the social parameters of her class.¹³⁷ At a celebration to mark the jubilee of the Duke of Atholl in January 1914, Lady Helen was complimented on 'her work for the revival of the Gaelic language which in Atholl had been entirely due to her efforts'.¹³⁸ In this Gaelic context, Lady Evelyn's work was not mentioned.

¹³² Robertson and Young, *Daughter of Atholl*, 19.

¹³³ Coxhead, Elizabeth, *Lady Gregory: A Literary Portrait* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966), 42.

¹³⁴ Sylvia Robertson and Tony Dilworth, eds, *Tales from Highland Perthshire* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 2009), 21–22.

¹³⁵ Robertson and Young, *Daughter of Atholl*, 55–56.

¹³⁶ See chapter 2, 36.

¹³⁷ See chapter 2, 30.

¹³⁸ 'Duke of Atholl's Jubilee', *The Scotsman*, 17 Jan 1914.

Lady Evelyn stands apart from the other women collectors discussed in this chapter; she does not appear to have followed a personal preference in her collecting but simply took down all that she could. While the restrictive social conventions for women impinged on all of their lives, in Lady Evelyn's case they were combined with the rigid social and gender codes dictated by her class and this in the end broke down her opposition to such an intellectually limited role. However, with the recent publication of her collection, over a century after it was made, her important contribution to the Gaelic language and oral tradition has at last been recognised.

Chapter Conclusions

The collecting focus and the collections, whether in published or in manuscript form, of the women discussed in this chapter reflect their diverse cultural backgrounds and their different perspectives on Gaelic oral tradition. However, it is clear that their gender was also an important factor in both the material they collected and their access to it, and in the value of their collections to the wider appreciation of Gaelic song and lore. Waulking songs, cradle and children's songs, and songs from other female domestic contexts, are all given a central place in their collecting. Indeed it has been stated by one scholar that 'thanks largely to [Frances] Tolmie and [Margaret Fay] Shaw the public corpus of Gaelic lullabies is substantial and comparable, or superior, to that of other countries'.¹³⁹ Amy Murray also made a small collection of children's songs from Eriskay,¹⁴⁰ with most if not all coming from Penny Campbell, with whom she established a rapport that would have been unlikely for a male collector.

All of the women were following a personal interest in their collecting, not any particular scholarly or academic trend, and they adopted a variety of literary forms to present the material they collected. A clear attachment to place is evident in the collecting work of Mary MacKellar, Katherine Whyte Grant and Frances Tolmie, all of whom were continuing a female line of cultural transmission, and they were motivated to continue that responsibility. A valuable aspect of the different collecting records that the women collectors have left is that other women emerge, not just as 'singers' or 'tradition bearers', but as individual women, friends, and

¹³⁹ Barbara Hillers, 'Dialogue or Monologue? Lullabies in Scottish Gaelic Tradition', in Byrne, Clancy & Kidd, *Litreachas & Eachdraidh Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig*, 2, 33–55 (38).

¹⁴⁰ Amy Murray (New York), 'Child-Songs of the Island of Youth', *CR*, 2 (1905–06), 314–327.

collaborators. Penny Campbell and Mary Ross, for example, were recognised as collecting partners as well as singers, in the work of Amy Murray and Frances Tolmie respectively, opening another window on the song tradition and on the way their lives as women interacted with the songs. There was also Kate McLean in Arisaig who sang for Lucy Broadwood, a collecting relationship that needs further research, along with Annie Johnston's role in facilitating Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's collecting in Barra.

The polarities of collecting approach can perhaps be seen as represented by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser and Frances Tolmie. The contrast was highlighted by Malcolm MacFarlane in a paper published in 1925, at a time when both women were still living:

Mrs Kennedy Fraser's Collection is marred by the tunes being adapted to English words and by the liberties taken with their original forms. [...] Also the new words are often conceived in a false Gaelic spirit for which there is no valid excuse.¹⁴¹

Frances Tolmie's work, on the other hand, was described as 'an excellent collection of Skye airs that can be relied on as giving the tunes in accordance with the forms in which she found them'. In 1953 Derick S. Thomson similarly contrasted the work of the two women, emphasising the practical aspects of Frances Tolmie's collection and highlighting the attention she gave to the contextual detail of the songs; Marjory Kennedy-Fraser is credited as having done 'valuable work in bringing Gaelic songs to the notice of a wider public', but that 'where she was at fault, and her advisors with her,¹⁴² was in imparting to this body of song an aura of twilight and fairy lights.'¹⁴³ These oppositional representations encapsulate the perspective that provoked a fierce backlash against Margery Kennedy-Fraser's work throughout the twentieth century, and which still surfaces in the present day.¹⁴⁴ In *Songs of the*

¹⁴¹ Malcolm MacFarlane, 'Half a Century of Vocal Gaelic Music', *TGSI*, 32 (1924–25), 220–272 (261).

¹⁴² 'Her advisor', singular, was, of course, Kenneth MacLeod who has to an extent escaped the degree of censure that Marjory Kennedy-Fraser has had over the years. Note, however, Somhairle MacGill-eain, 'Road to the Isles', in *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, ed. by Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock, (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011), 14–15.

¹⁴³ Derick S. Thomson, 'The Gaelic Oral Tradition', *The Scottish Anthropological and Folklore Society*, 5 (1954–55), 1–17 (15).

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Somhairle Mac Gill-eain, 'Realism in Gaelic Poetry' in *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, ed. by William Gillies, (Stornoway: Acair, 1985), 15–47 (20); Criticism from John Lorne Campbell,

Hebrides, Marjory Kennedy-Fraser published her own interpretation of the music and texts of the songs she collected, incorporating romantic translations and prose pieces by Kenneth MacLeod, and the whole reflecting an imagined Gaelic culture, viewed through the soft focus lens of the ‘Celtic Twilight’. The problem was not with what she did with the songs but with the external ideas and discourse that fed on the cultural perspective she presented. These could emerge as positive-sounding but ultimately dismissive views:

[A] dying race, unsurpassed in spiritual perception [...] cradled in the mystery of the mountains and the sea, children of dreams [from whom] she rescued a heritage of native song which in its essential appeal and haunting loveliness, the world has produced few if any equals.¹⁴⁵

or negative outbursts of undisguised cultural colonialism:

Gaelic purists [...] would submit cultured audiences to the Gaelic songs in their raw state, inflicting upon them interminable verses in which the melody is lost in an overdose of words and impoverished by singers who have either lost the natural art of singing or have failed to acquire it.¹⁴⁶

It was the songs in their ‘raw state’ that Frances Tolmie wanted to preserve in her collection, and which she herself sang, unaccompanied, on rare occasions at the Celtic Union in Edinburgh in the early years of the twentieth century. It was not however until the 1950s and in the more culturally confident and enlightened atmosphere of the Folk-Song revival that singers such as Kitty MacLeod (1914–2000) and later Flora MacNeil (b. 1928), finally provided a public counterpoint to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser’s interpretation of the songs of the Hebrides.

Wearing his Gaelic hat, Kenneth MacLeod referred to Frances Tolmie as ‘tè nan òran’,¹⁴⁷ and described her collection as ‘a work of highest value, [that] will be

Somhairle Mac Gill-eain and others cited in Michel Byrne, ‘Cò leis a ‘ Mhuir?’, *Aiste*, 1 (2007), 38–75; Somhairle MacGill-eain, ‘Soraidh le NicUalraig-Fhriseal’, in Whyte and Dymock, *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, 421.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Mrs Kennedy-Fraser: Memorial Service in St. Giles’, *The Scotsman*, 26 Nov 1930.

¹⁴⁶ Joyce Fleming, ‘Points of View’, *The Scotsman*, 6 Sept 1948.

¹⁴⁷ ‘The Woman of the Songs’. See Coinneach MacLeòid, ‘Gàidheil a b’aithne Dhomh’, in *Sgrìobhaidhean Choinnich MhicLeòid*, ed. by T M Murchison (Edinburgh: The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1988), 59–67 (67).

appreciated more and more as the years pass'.¹⁴⁸ At the time her collection was published, George Henderson likewise predicted that 'Many in future years will turn to these papers when more bulky and more pretentious volumes are forgotten'.¹⁴⁹ Both comments were prescient in suggesting that Frances Tolmie's collection was before its time. If, in the 1860s, Frances Tolmie felt that the vernacular songs and particularly those of the women's tradition were being ignored, by the time her collection was published others were beginning to notice the rich diversity of this genre. Frances Tolmie's song collection anticipated this change which, as noted at the start of this chapter, later collections would follow and develop.

In contrast to Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, the two women performers of Gaelic song who provide the focus of discussion in the next chapter were enthusiastically received by their Gaelic-speaking audiences, and they were able to use their authority on the performance platform in different ways to promote the Gaelic language and the wider Gaelic cause.

¹⁴⁸ Murchison, *Sgrìobhaidhean Choinnich MhicLeòid*, xxxvii. Kenneth MacLeod was a good friend of Frances Tolmie, a relationship enriched by their shared Eigg connections.

¹⁴⁹ George Henderson to Lucy Broadwood, 2 Jan 1912. Copy in NLS Acc.7040/9.



Plate 8: Frances Tolmie.

(‘A Distinguished Daughter of Skye’, Newspaper Cutting, source unknown)



Plate 9: Marjory Kennedy-Fraser with Kenneth MacLeod on a collecting trip to Eriskay. (Stiùbhart Mac-an-Sealgair, ‘Marsali nan Òran’, *Gairm*, 11 (1955), 217–220 (220)).

Women on the Gaelic Platform

Mary MacPherson, the famous Skye poetess, appeared on the platform, and sang her ancient songs to thunders of applause. She also made a speech on this occasion, clothed from head to foot in tartan of her own making.¹

The late Miss MacLachlan sang “Mo Dhachaidh” at her first appearance in New York and her rendition of it was perfect and of course the audience seemed to understand every word of it. After she had gone to Canada I was kept busy by many who heard her who desired to learn the song. In fact a few would be singers made the attempt after I had coached them a bit, but of course I have never heard and never will hear again any one who could sing it like Jessie MacLachlan.²

In a report of the first Mòd, held in Oban in 1892, it was noted that ‘Jessie MacLachlan (the famous Gaelic singer) was present, and Mrs MacPherson, the Skye Poetess’.³ The former, a young woman in her twenties was embarking on a professional singing career on the concert platform; the latter, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran, was in her seventies, and nearing the end of a life in which, despite economic and personal trials, she gained an approved status in an intrinsically masculine domain, articulating Gaelic cultural and political perspectives on a public platform. It is not possible to know if the two women met on this occasion, although in such a small gathering it would be quite likely. If they did, they must have presented an interesting contrast – the statuesque matriarch in her tartan homespun and the striking young woman dressed in a glamorous and modern style. They belonged to different generations and the circumstances of their lives, like their appearance,

¹ ‘The Mod at Oban’, *Leeds Mercury*, 5 Sept 1893.

² Don[al]d Currie, c/o Mrs Stitt, Glasgow, to Malcolm MacFarlane, May 22 [19]16.

³ ‘First Mòd at Oban’, *Oban Express*, 14 Sept 1892.

reflected the polarity between the traditional and the modern world that was an overarching narrative in the *fin de siècle* period. They both, however, challenged general gender assumptions and hierarchies by embracing the particular public platform that opened up to them through the power of their individual voice, and in different ways they both used their authority on the platform to promote the Gaelic cause.

This chapter discusses a number of individual women who used the opportunity provided by the Gaelic performance platform to develop a public role in support of Gaelic. It focuses in particular on Mary MacPherson (c1821–1898) and Jessie N. MacLachlan (1866–1916), exploring the various cultural contexts in which they performed, the influential individuals and Gaelic networks that supported them, and discusses the different ways in which they were able to deploy both their gender and their public profile as performers of Gaelic song to promote various educational, social and socio-political aspects of Gaelic culture.

The Gaelic Platform

It was through the activities of the various Gaelic societies and associations that formed in Lowland towns and cities throughout the nineteenth century, but particularly in the second half of the century, that the platform became the focal point of formal Gaelic gatherings, a prominent social space that reflected the male hierarchy of most of these groups. At the second Annual Social Gathering of the Perth Gaelic Society in 1882, for example, it was reported that ‘[Pipe Major] Donald Farqu[h]arson headed a procession consisting of the chairman and the *gentlemen* who had been honoured with platform tickets, from the Committee Room to the platform’.⁴ [emphasis added] At the Annual Gatherings of the Gaelic Society of Inverness the platform party was regularly composed of a select group of Highland lairds, Highland clergy, male dignitaries and men of influence in the town, along with a few Gaelic activists such as John Murdoch and Professor Blackie. At the sixteenth Annual Assembly (1888) of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, the lone female on the platform was the Bard to the Society, Mary MacKellar.⁵

⁴ John MacKay, *Highlanders! Stand Shoulder to Shoulder: A History of the Gaelic Society of Perth* (Perth, The Gaelic Society of Perth: 2002), 5.

⁵ ‘Annual Assembly’, *TGSI*, 15 (1888–89), 1–10 (1).

The platform also became a Gaelic performance space at the public gatherings and cèilidhs in the Lowland towns and cities where the Gaelic diaspora had settled. The urban cèilidh and the singing of well-known Gaelic songs maintained social and cultural cohesion and identity as well as providing a focus for Gaelic-speaking Highlanders to come together socially.⁶ In this new cultural context the performance of Gaelic song became established in a public arena. Gaelic singers who were particularly well received were given regular exposure on the Gaelic circuit, and graduated to the platforms of the large venues where the Annual Gatherings were held. For singers who were successfully established on the concert circuit within the Gaelic community, and particularly with a Mòd gold medal to their credit, doors often opened to wider music-related opportunities, some of which offered financial reward. In 1901, for example, Mary M. MacLeod was invited to sing at the annual Irish Oireachtas on the basis of her ‘frequent successful appearances on city Highland platforms’,⁷ an invitation that was repeated in subsequent years with other singers. The Gaelic concert platform therefore offered a cultural public space where women in particular could potentially expand their sphere of participation and influence, and this in turn could open doors to wider opportunities.

With the advent of An Comunn Gàidhealach, the Mòd further established the platform as a performance space for Gaelic song, and as well as encouraging the circulation of particular songs, consolidated a style of singing that reflected the formality of the platform setting. At the first Mòd in Oban in 1892, it was noted that the competitors in the main singing competition for women showed distinct signs of platform nerves except for one competitor, Mary MacPherson, who strode confidently on to the stage, taking time to greet the judges in the passing, before taking up her singing position.⁸ She was by this time a seasoned performer on the platforms of the large urban cèilidhs,⁹ and was unusual in that performance setting in

⁶ In Glasgow, this social space was an important factor in the Highland community’s ‘non-assimilation’ in the city in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. See Joan MacKenzie, ‘The Highland Community in Glasgow in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Non-Assimilation’, Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Stirling, 1987.

⁷ ‘Our Glasgow Letter’, *OT*, 8 June 1901.

⁸ ‘An Comunn Gaidhealach: First Mòd at Oban’ *Oban Express*, 14 Sept 1892.

⁹ ‘Ro-Radh’ in *Màiri Mhòr nan Òran*, ed. by Dòmhnall Eachann Meek (Edinburgh: Gaelic Texts Society, 1998), 7.

singing her own compositions in which she articulated a sense of Gaelic community, place and cultural identity. She was, however, equally comfortable and gained remarkable acceptance as a ‘platform woman’, articulating in song her support for the crofters in the Land War of the late 1870s and 1880s, at a time when women in wider society were criticised and often personally ridiculed if they ventured onto what was perceived as a male space.¹⁰ Màiri Mhòr can be seen as a ‘platform woman’ in every sense in her public activism within a socio-political movement that was all male, at least in its public representation. She has been described as ‘assuming a matriarchal role in defence of the Highland people’,¹¹ and the next section explores the degree to which she was able to develop and expand this role to promote a wider female significance.

Màiri Mhòr nan Òran

The general acceptance of Mary MacPherson as the public voice for the crofters’ cause, a political campaign that was male-dominated both in leadership and perception,¹² might seem to indicate a surprisingly liberal view towards women taking on an active public role. There are numerous examples from other contemporaneous situations where women standing on such a visibly public platform were subject to negative comment; Sarah Jane Rees, a prominent leader, activist, and founder of Undeb Dirwestol Merched y De (the South Wales Women’s Temperance Union) in 1901, was derided by some men who suggested ‘that she was a man in female form, or a woman in masculine form, [or] that she belonged neither to the one

¹⁰ An article published in the *OT* (‘Womanhood’, 13 June 1891) suggests attitudes to women speaking from a public platform were becoming slightly less entrenched towards the end of the century: ‘A few years ago the notion of a woman mounting a platform and addressing a mixed audience was exceedingly disagreeable to society generally [...] and epithets the opposite of complimentary were applied to those who ventured on such a proceeding’. For this discussion in relation to the women’s suffrage campaign, with references to other political movements, see Eileen Janes Yeo, ‘Introduction: Some paradoxes of empowerment’, in Yeo, *Radical Femininity: Women’s self-representation in the public sphere*, 1–24 (10) and note 24, (22).

¹¹ Donald E. Meek, ‘Introduction’ in *Tuath is Tighearna*, ed. by Donald E. Meek (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1995), 10–40 (24).

¹² Clearly women were directly and indirectly involved in the Crofters’ War but the extent and detail of their participation needs more research. Some studies have addressed the subject in relation to specific geographical areas, but female involvement has not been given particular attention in a comprehensive way. See, for example, Joni Buchanan, *The Lewis Land Struggle: Na Gaisgich* (Stornoway: Acair, 1996), 87–89; and by the same author, ‘Women in the Front Line in the Crofters’ War’, *West Highland Free Press*, 15 Oct 1993.

sex nor the other'.¹³ Many women public speakers in the high-profile women's suffrage movement were similarly characterised and denounced. Both temperance and suffrage were areas where women had secured a degree of autonomy, and consequently their vilification may have been more severe as men reacted against women gaining their own space in the public domain. However, in the male-dominated Land League in Ireland, contemporaneous and mutually supportive with the land struggle in the Highlands, it was the case that the Ladies' Land League (formed in 1881) was tolerated in the 'hour of need' but its members were expected to return to conventional feminine duties after the crisis was over.¹⁴ Initially supported by their male counterparts on the grounds that a philanthropic role in supporting evicted families and alleviating hardship was a suitably feminine form of activism, their involvement in much broader and significant activity was later misrepresented,¹⁵ their efforts seen as overstepping their allotted arena so that they were perceived as 'out of control'.¹⁶

A number of different factors contributed to Màiri Mhòr being accepted as a woman on the crofters' platform, not least that she was 'of the people', and from a crofting family that struggled to make a living from the limited land they had access to. She shared and understood the deeply felt associations of land, kinship and community, and significantly she had the ability to articulate that essence in her songs. Importantly, she was 'speaking' through the voice of song, and traditionally in Gaelic society it was in the composition and performance of song that women were accorded a public voice.¹⁷ In addition, Gaelic communities retained a basic

¹³ Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage' in *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830–1939*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 135–158 (150).

¹⁴ See Margaret Ward, 'The Ladies' Land League and the Irish Land War 1881/1882: Defining the Relationship between Women and Nation', in *Gendered Nations*, ed. by Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 229–247 (240).

¹⁵ For a discussion of this 'misrepresentation' see Jane Côté and Dana Hearne, 'Anna Parnell' in *Women, Power and Consciousness in 19th Century Ireland*, ed. by Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy (Dublin: Attic Press, 1995), 263–293; See also Maria Luddy, 'Women in Politics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland' in *Women and Irish History* ed. by Maryann Gialanella Valiulius and Mary O'Dowd (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997), 89–108, (96–98).

¹⁶ Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne: A Biography* (London: Pandora, 1990), 22.

¹⁷ Although women's songs were frequently sung to accompany female tasks such as rocking the cradle, spinning wool or shrinking cloth, the subjects addressed were not confined by their domestic function, and the feminine context at times acted as a 'foil' for strong opinions and political comment.

respect for the accomplished poetic voice,¹⁸ particularly when it successfully reflected the mood and aspirations of the local community with reference to embedded cultural associations and signals.¹⁹ Therefore, from an internal Gaelic understanding, Màiri Mhòr was accepted as fulfilling the public function of a poet or song-maker, without any gender conflict. The press reports of a significant gathering convened by the Land Law Reform Association at Bonar Bridge in 1886 and attended by Màiri Mhòr,²⁰ mostly note only that the ‘Skye poetess’ was present. There were some detractors however: the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*,²¹ in a generally negative article laced with a heavy dose of sarcasm, described the ‘Skye poetess’ as ‘unusually flushed’ when the demonstration gathered at the site of a recent eviction, and made reference to her ‘wailing coronach’. The same report stated that on the second day ‘diversity’ was provided by ‘an exhortation in Gaelic by Mrs MacPherson, the Skye poetess, followed by the singing of a weird and plaintive song in her native tongue’. The most personal attack, appeared in the *Belfast News-Letter*, which reported that ‘Mrs Mary MacPherson, known to local fame as “the Skye poetess” rushed into the assembled delegates and like “Silas Wegg” immediately “dropped into poetry” supposed to be appropriate to the occasion’.²² The insults implied in the reference to the Dickens character, who was a seller of ballads and not entirely literate, are obvious enough, but are not specific to her gender. However, a report in the *Liverpool Mercury* focused on Màiri Mhòr as a woman, and in a detailed and generally supportive article offered the following vignette:

Just prior to the commencement of business, an incident quite dramatic in character occurred, which had an almost thrilling effect upon the sensitively emotional Gaels assembled together in obedience to the call of patriotism. The well-known Skye poetess, Mary MacPherson, was observed to enter the hall, and was immediately greeted by plaudits and

¹⁸ John MacInnes, ‘The Bard through History’, in *The Voice of the Bard*, ed. by Timothy Neat (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), 321–351 (338).

¹⁹ John MacInnes, ‘Gaelic Poetry in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal: Selected Essays of John MacInnes*, ed. by Michael Newton (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), 357–379 (362).

²⁰ This was held at the end of September 1886, just a few months after the passing of The Crofting Act. See James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2nd edn., 2000), 227.

²¹ *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 29 Sept 1886.

²² ‘Scotch News’, *Belfast News-Letter*, 29 Sept 1886. The negative tone of the article was not surprising in view of the consistently Conservative political stance of the paper in the nineteenth century, which courted a Protestant land-owning and commercial readership throughout Ireland. ‘British Newspapers 1800–1900’, <<http://newspapers11.bl.uk/blcs/BelfastNewsLetter.htm>> [Accessed 8 April 2012]

some cries in Gaelic. She responded by reciting an apostrophe in verse in the same language – which surely is the language of fervency – welcoming delegates to the meeting, and urging them to a brave stance on behalf of their kinsmen in distress. Her appearance as she paced the whole length of the hall with uplifted hands – her plaid of Macpherson tartan, disposed to show to advantage her tall, large-proportioned figure – was striking in the extreme. Her voice was full and sonorous for a woman, yet wanting in none of the finer inflections of the feminine vocal organs, and gave her action an almost sybiline [*sic*] effect which was not without its influence upon that portion of her auditory – the smaller portion – who did not understand the Gaelic language.²³

The image of Màiri Mhòr as a prophetess is clearly suggested here, not just by the reference to her statuesque appearance, but also to her actions (‘uplifted hands’) and her voice (‘full and sonorous’), and confirmed in the adjective sibylline. While the writer is careful to establish the poet’s femininity, there is a need to identify her with some other persona to explain her powerful presence, authority and reception in a crowd of some three hundred men. Her physical stature, as noted here, was certainly an element in Màiri Mhòr’s ability to command attention but it was her vocal authority that attracted the most comment. The passage quoted notes that her voice also affected those who did not understand Gaelic, and therefore it obviously had a communicative power beyond linguistic content. The quality of the female voice as ‘an empowering difference’ has been discussed in connection with the vocal performances of, for example, the operatic diva, the lamenting woman (in many cultures), and the black woman’s blues, particular performance arenas in which cultural approval allows women space to claim the authority of the female voice.²⁴ For Màiri Mhòr, it was in her experience of extreme personal distress, in particular her sense of powerlessness and humiliation in the face of an accusation of theft, and subsequent imprisonment, that she found her public voice,²⁵ – a ‘convincing lyrical cry’ as Somhairle Mac Gill-eain described it²⁶ – and the means of her empowerment.

²³ ‘The Highland Convention at Bonar Bridge’, *Liverpool Mercury*, 29 Sept 1886.

²⁴ *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. by Lesley C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

²⁵ ‘S e na dh’fhuiling mi de thàmailt / A thug mo bhàrdachd beò’, the last two lines in the poem ‘Eilean A’ Cheò’, in Màiri Nic-A-Phearsoin, *Dain agus Orain* (Inverness: A. & U. Mac-Coinnich, 1891), 3–9 (9).

²⁶ Somhairle Mac Gill-eain, ‘The Poetry of the Clearances’ in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean*, ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair, 1985), 48–74 (71).

Although Màiri Mhòr gained a place on the public platform through the cultural endorsement of her songs, she also developed and extended her authority beyond the vocal by her ability to sense significant moments, and to mark them in theatrical and symbolic gestures; presenting bunches of heather to particular speakers after powerful orations,²⁷ greeting the five Braes crofters from the train at Strome²⁸ on their return from their court appearance in Inverness with whisky and oatcakes, and thus being very visibly present with them as they then sailed into Portree to a heroes' welcome, and more militantly, by requesting the burning of anti-crofter newspapers at Glenelg.²⁹ In similarly symbolic but more personal ways, she used her talent and artistry in the traditionally feminine skills of spinning and cloth-making to demonstrate her support and admiration for certain influential individuals. She presented, for example, a plaid to Professor Blackie, made of tartan tweed she designed herself, and named 'The Blackie' in his honour,³⁰ and in 1882, she created an entirely 'Skye-made' suit for Charles Fraser-Mackintosh, the Gaelic-speaking Liberal MP and prominent figure in the land struggle, 'in recognition of his valuable services to the Highlands and Highlanders'.³¹ In the case of the latter project, the suit was representative of both her own skill and of her native island, from the raw fleece and the natural dyes, down to the very thread with which it was sewn together. The cloth was publicly displayed in Portree before it was tailored, 'where it was much admired as a specimen of native industry'. The year is significant; 1882 was pivotal for emerging crofting activism, particularly in Skye, where the 'Battle of the Braes' in April of that year was the catalyst for a more organised political campaign.³² The Braes confrontation was widely reported in the press, where attention was drawn to the involvement of women, and Màiri Mhòr possibly had that in mind in planning the suit, but also the possibility that worn by the right honourable recipient, it would be noted and admired not just in the streets of Inverness, but in the corridors and clubs of the Houses of Parliament, at a time when Skye was receiving such negative

²⁷ 'The Highland Convention at Bonar Bridge', *Liverpool Mercury*, 29 Sept 1886.

²⁸ *Scotsman*, 27 April 1882. The Highland Railway at this time terminated at Strome. See also: Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, 194–199.

²⁹ *Scottish Highlander*, 16 October 1885, quoted in Sheila M. Kidd, 'Burning Issues: Reactions to the Highland Press during the 1885 Election Campaign' in *Caindel Alban: Fèill-Sgrìobhainn do Dhomhnall E Meek*, ed. by Colm Ó Baoill and Nancy R. McGuire (Aberdeen: Oilthigh Obar Dheathain, 2008), [SGS, 24], 285–307 (285).

³⁰ Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Òran*, 29.

³¹ 'A Suit made in Skye', *OT*, October, 1882, reprinted in the *OT*, 27 March 1915.

³² See: Hunter, 187–199.; I. M. M. MacPhail, *The Crofters' War* (Stornoway, Acair: 1989), 36–46.

attention in that particular arena. Her ‘glorious pride’ in her native island³³ was always her cultural touchstone and everything that went into the making of the suit was resonant with that sentiment. The buttons, for example, were made from wood taken from a tree that had grown next to Flora MacDonald’s house in Flodigarry, and thus the honour and bravery of the Skye heroine of the Jacobite cause was also signified. As examples from many different cultures illustrate, cloth can acquire symbolic meaning and communicate social, cultural and political values.³⁴ In the example of the ‘Suit made in Skye’ this was implicit in the cloth with its fibres and colours coming from the land itself; in the bestowing onto the recipient certain qualities that Màiri Mhòr associated with her home island; and in the message the suit would carry when worn in public. In her song ‘Eilean a’ Cheò’, Màiri Mhòr refers to ‘An tìr san robh na fiùrain, ’S gach cùis a sheas an còir’, and this sentiment can perhaps be seen as an example of the heroic virtues she understood to be invested in the fabric of the Skye suit. The skills that Màiri Mhòr clearly had in wool-work and in the making of tweed,³⁵ and the importance of this work in her life, is evident from the fact that four out of the five formally posed photographs in *Dàin agus Orain* illustrate different aspects of the cloth-making process.³⁶ The extent to which she utilised this female skill to make a public and political statement is worthy of greater attention. It might also be suggested that in promoting home-spun tweed in this way, she was seeking to reclaim home industries from the philanthropic clutches of the land-owning aristocracy.

The platform at the first Mòd in Oban in 1892 can, perhaps, also be seen as another example of Màiri Mhòr’s ability to ‘sense the moment’, and further reflects her engagement with the powerful symbolism of cloth. When she took to the platform at the Mòd and before she began singing, she took time to address the president of An Comunn Gàidhealach, Lord Archibald Campbell, praising him for his staunch defence of the tartan.³⁷ Significantly, the song she chose to sing was

³³ Somhairle Mac Gill-eain, ‘The Poetry of the Clearances’, in Gillies, *Ris a’ Bhruthaich*, 71.

³⁴ See *Cloth and Human Experience*, ed. by Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1989).

³⁵ See Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Oran*, 29.

³⁶ See Màiri Nic-a-Phearsoin, *Dàin agus Orain*, 32, 80, 192, & 144.

³⁷ See *Oban Express*, 14 Sept 1892. There was an attempt by the War Office in the early 1880s to dispense with the tartan kilts worn by the Highland regiments, a decision which was overturned by a protest led by Lord Archibald. See Rev. Gillespie Campbell, ‘Lord Archibald Campbell’, in *CR*, 9 (1913), 65–70. It is worth noting that Mary MacKellar also composed a song on this subject which

‘Breacan Màiri Ùisdein’,³⁸ which she had re-worked from an existing song, and which could equally be understood as ‘Breacan Màiri Mhòir’ or ‘Màiri Mhòr’s Tartan’, and as a personal address to the audience:

Ged tha mo ghuth air fàilneachadh,
 ’S cho fad’ on dh’fhàg mi ’n dùthaich
 Gun cuir mi rann sa Ghàidhlig dhuibh
 Air breacan Màiri Ùisdein
 [...]
 Tha mi nochd am measg nan Gàidheal,
 M’ aigne blàth air taobh mo dhùthcha,
 ’S gun toir mi comhairl’ àraidh dhuibh
 Mu bhreacan Màiri Ùisdein.
 [...]
 Nuair chuimhnicheas mi air Wallace,
 Air Rob Ruadh agus air Dùghlas,³⁹
 A dhìon ar tìr o thràillealachd
 Fo bhreacan Màiri Ùisdein.

On one level this is a light-hearted song that praises a colourful tartan plaid, specifically one made by a woman called Màiri Ùisdein,⁴⁰ but it also strongly reflects

was sung at the 10th Annual Assembly of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, in which she praises ‘[Na] Gaisgich, G’an robh ’m breacan dualach’, and she also gives ‘Caimbeulach og’ credit for his part in the matter. See ‘Fleasgach an Fhuilte Chraobhaich, Chais’, *TGSI*, 10 (1881–83), 72–73.

³⁸ Màiri Nic-a-Phearsain, *Dàin agus Orain*, 31–34. See also notes to the poem in Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Òran*, 130–131.

³⁹ Donald Meek (*Màiri Mhòr nan Òran*, 130) suggests that this might not necessarily refer to Rob Roy but rather Robert the Bruce. This seems very probable given that the same line links ‘Rob Ruadh’ with ‘Dùghlas’, the latter possibly referring to Sir James Douglas (Black Douglas), who was a loyal friend to Robert the Bruce. It could perhaps draw on the heroic reputation of both Roberts; Màiri Mhòr might have been familiar with an anonymous elegy, ‘Marbhrann do Rob Ruadh MacGriogair’, in which one verse states: ‘Bu tu seabhag an t-sluaigh, Ris an cainte Rob Ruadh, ’S math thig breacan mun cuairt is claidhe dhuit’. (*An Lasair*, ed. by Ronald Black (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 146).

the generic and symbolic understandings of ‘breacan’ with Gaelic identity and heroism.⁴¹ Gaelic heroes down through history are roll-called in the song, from Wallace and Robert the Bruce (or possibly Rob Roy), to Colin Campbell who earned glory at the battle of Balaclava, all of whom were empowered by wearing the ‘breacan’. The ‘breacan’ was of course also potently symbolic of an earlier attempt by the British Government to quell Highland rebellion in implementing the Disclothing Act in the aftermath of Culloden, an injustice that would have been conveyed vividly to Màiri Mhòr within the cèilidh-house tradition of her youth, through songs like ‘Soraidh leis a’ bhreacan ùr’.⁴² This, then, was Màiri Mhòr, the matriarchal figure, having reached the milestone age of three score years and ten, sensing the importance of a new Gaelic platform, and marking it with a song that promoted the product of women’s skill and artistry as symbolic of the strength and heroic tradition of the Gael. From a gender perspective this could be seen as ‘a paradox of empowerment’ with the strength and power of the male hero delivered through the cloth-making skill of domestic women. From a range of symbolic associations, Màiri Mhòr’s appearance on the Gaelic platform clad from head to toe in her bold home-spun tartan can be seen as having gender, cultural and political significance.

When Màiri Mhòr was provoked to compose songs at a moment of personal crisis, she already had an understanding, absorbed in her early years and youth in Skye, of the layers of imagery and cultural references that were an intrinsic part of the Gaelic song tradition. She was therefore well equipped for the wider public role that opened up to her as a result of her skill in making songs and the acceptance and approval with which they were received by Gaelic-speaking audiences. Jessie N. MacLachlan, on the other hand, was a generation younger and in her upbringing in Oban she did not experience the Gaelic song tradition in such an immediate and undiluted way. However, through her performance of popular Gaelic songs on many prestigious platforms at home and abroad, she developed her own role as an ambassador for Gaelic. In examining the career of Jessie MacLachlan in particular,

⁴⁰ See ‘Breacan Mairi Uisdean’ by John MacLean, Balemartin, in *Na Baird Thirisdeach air a dheasachadh leis an Urr. Eachann Camshron* (A’ Chomunn Thirisdeach, 1932), 155–158.

⁴¹ See John MacInnes, ‘The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry’ in Newton, *Dùthchas nan Gàidheal*, 265–319 (282 & 313).

⁴² For discussion of this particular song see Anne Lorne Gillies, *Songs of Gaelic Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2005), 194–196.

the next section explores the professional concert platform as a space of influence and, at times, controversy, with reference also to other female singers who utilized their professional singing voice in support of the Gaelic cause.

The Concert Platform: Jessie N. MacLachlan

Women performing on the public concert platform in the Victorian era in any musical genre were subject to a range of gendered perceptions and prejudices. Genteel Victorian attitudes could admire the cultured female voice or instrumental performance in private gatherings but struggled to accommodate the same performances on an openly public platform, particularly when female performers were being paid a fee. The connotations are not difficult to extrapolate. By the late decades of the century, however, women vocalists were generally accepted on the concert platform, with the most famous being the great operatic divas.⁴³

There were three Gaelic-speaking women in particular – Jessie N. MacLachlan, Iona Robertson, and Flora F. Donaldson – who graduated from their early singing experience within their local Gaelic community to become professional singers on a Scottish, British and Colonial concert platform. They all, to varying degrees, continued to include Gaelic songs in their concert repertoire and in addition, in different ways took on ambassadorial roles for the Gaelic cause at home and abroad. The most successful of these three singers and most widely known and appreciated in her day was Jessie Niven MacLachlan, frequently billed as ‘The Scottish Prima Donna’, ‘The Queen of Scottish Song’ or at times as ‘The Gaelic Prima Donna’. As well as regular engagements at the more prestigious Gaelic gatherings in Scotland and in London, she undertook several extensive and gruelling world tours between 1901 and 1914, where she sang in some of the most prestigious music halls of the period, as well as in numerous provincial theatres, often before audiences that were numbered in their thousands. Of striking appearance, Jessie MacLachlan clearly had an affecting charisma on stage, described in one review as ‘[a] wonderful magnetic power’.⁴⁴ Although she married in 1887, shortly before her 21st birthday, she continued to pursue her singing career. Her husband, Robert Buchanan, a well-known Glasgow pianist and organist, toured with her as

⁴³ See Paula Gillet, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914* (London: MacMillan Press, 2000).

⁴⁴ ‘The Highland Soprano’, *Marlborough Express*, [New Zealand] 12 Aug 1907.

accompanist and musical director, and it was probable that this allowed her to side-step the particularly strong social disapproval directed towards married women who continued to pursue a career, a view that also applied to women on the concert platform.⁴⁵ She was fêted on her overseas tours in the style of the great operatic divas of the day; there were large welcome receptions to greet her arrival and crowds would gather to bid her farewell, and presentations of bouquets of flowers and gifts, including the precious jewellery with which it was customary to honour the most successful operatic singers.⁴⁶ By including and promoting Gaelic on this glamorous platform, Jessie MacLachlan challenged outsider prejudice and encouraged indigenous Gaelic confidence and pride.

Born in Oban in 1866, Jessie MacLachlan's vocal talent was noted from an early age. Her father, originally from Tobermory, was an auctioneer in the town, and therefore the family might be considered as upper working-class. An interview with the singer when she was touring Australia in 1905 provides important detail on the Gaelic and Highland networks that facilitated her access to a career as a professional singer. It was the Gaelic enthusiast and activist Professor Blackie, who was credited as being 'a valued help and adviser to her [...] throughout the early days of her career'.⁴⁷ Professor Blackie's credentials as a supporter of individual women seeking to fulfil their intellectual and creative ambitions, as has already been noted, are well-known in a Gaelic context through his encouragement of both Mary MacPherson and Mary MacKellar,⁴⁸ but also more generally in the academic world he is on record as a 'champion of the cause of lady students' and that he 'protested in both speech and letter against the shabby conduct of those in opposition'.⁴⁹ The positive encouragement of a man of his experience and standing would certainly have been extremely influential at a time (the early 1880s) when there was still considerable social prejudice with regard to female respectability and the public platform.⁵⁰ Indeed, Jessie MacLachlan herself referred to the 'horror' with which some members

⁴⁵ Gillet, *Musical Women*, 9.

⁴⁶ 'Presentation Jewels', *Brisbane Courier*, 13 July 1905.

⁴⁷ 'Jessie MacLachlan's Arrival', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 April 1905. Blackie built a house in Oban in 1866, and would have been aware of Jessie MacLachlan's singing potential as a young girl.

⁴⁸ See chapter 4, 113–114.

⁴⁹ Anna M. Stoddart, *John Stuart Blackie: A Biography* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1895), 51.

⁵⁰ Paula Gillett discusses evolving perspectives on the female public singer in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in: *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914*, particularly in Chapter 6, 'Immortal Tones: Women as Public Singer', 142–187.

of her family reacted to her desire to pursue a professional singing career.⁵¹ In counteracting this negativity, impeccable associations of respectability in the form of the support and patronage of the aristocratic House of Argyll were to consolidate her successful singing career. No doubt sensitive to the Gaelic tradition of the role of the clan chief as a patron of the arts, and with unflinching Argyllshire loyalty and a degree of sympathy for the Gaelic cause, Lord Archibald Campbell,⁵² his daughter Lady Elspeth and significantly, his sister-in-law, the Princess Louise, all took an interest in the singer. In particular, having been present at Jessie MacLachlan's London debut at the Gaelic Society of London in 1892, it was Lord Archibald who invited the singer to perform at the Grand Concert at the first Mòd in Oban later the same year. This was a typically diplomatic and judicious move given that she was a daughter of the town and her participation would no doubt engender much local pride and support. On that occasion Jessie MacLachlan was introduced to the Princess Louise, who had attended the concert and enjoyed her singing, and as a result the Oban singer was invited to sing before Queen Victoria at Balmoral Castle just a few weeks later, when it was subsequently reported that the Queen had been 'especially pleased' with her Gaelic songs.⁵³

One of Jessie MacLachlan's earliest professional performances in the Highlands was for the Annual Assembly of the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1885 when she was just nineteen. The *Transactions* of the Society reported that:

[H]er rendering of 'Caismeachd Chlann-Chamroinn' and other Gaelic songs, as well as English songs, was marked by perfect enunciation and genuine feeling. Her voice is clear and ringing, with well-balanced strength both in the lower as well as the upper registers, and as a ballad singer she exhibits a thorough appreciation of her theme.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 'Miss Jessie MacLachlan', *Australian Town and County Journal*, 3 May 1905.

⁵² Lord Archibald and his wife were patrons of other artists, including the painter Whistler, who painted a number of portraits of Lady Campbell. See 'The Correspondence of James McNeill Whistler',

<http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/correspondence/people/biog/?bid=Camp_A&initial=C> [accessed 10 April 2012]

⁵³ 'A Leading Highland Vocalist', *OT*, 8 Oct 1892.

⁵⁴ 'Annual Assembly', *TGSI*, 12 (1885–86), 13–14.

When she performed at Balmoral, Jessie MacLachlan was required to intimate beforehand the songs she intended to perform, no doubt to be sure that they met with the Queen's taste. While the singer's choice of songs on this occasion met with royal approval, the potential political pitfalls of Gaelic repertoire were made apparent a few years later in September 1896 when Jessie MacLachlan was again engaged to sing at the annual Gaelic concert in Oban. Although this event started with the first Mòd, it continued to take place annually in Oban after the Mòd had become a peripatetic event. Significantly, this concert coincided with the Argyllshire Gathering, a highlight of the social circuit of the Highland upper classes, gentry and aristocracy. In a report on the concert, it was noted that: 'Miss MacLachlan sang "Mo Mhàili bheag òg" (My Little Young Mary) in place of "Fuadach nan Gàidheal" (The Dispersion of the Highlanders) [as was] marked in the programme'.⁵⁵ The programme change provoked a furious response in a letter from 'Fionn', published in the *OT*.⁵⁶ The grounds for his displeasure were both personal and ideological; in the first place he was the author of the ousted song, or as he put it, the song that was 'prevented' from being sung at the concert; and in addition he had also been an active supporter of the Land League through the Federation of Celtic Societies, and with the more radical Skye Vigilance Committee, during the land agitation of over a decade earlier.⁵⁷ His letter to the paper, included the Gaelic words of the song in full but interestingly without any English translation,⁵⁸ and he asked whether, as seems very probable, the reason that the song was 'prohibited' was because 'its sentiments were objectionable to the Argyllshire lairds?'.⁵⁹ To his mind the change was 'illogical' on the grounds that:

[W]hen our leading exponent of Gaelic song – Miss J. N. MacLachlan – was engaged to sing [...] it was expressly stipulated that 'Fuadach nan

⁵⁵ 'Grand Gaelic Concert', *OT*, 12 Sept 1896.

⁵⁶ 'The Recent Gaelic Concert at Oban', *OT*, 19 Sept 1896.

⁵⁷ See MacPhail, *The Crofters' War*, 89; Meek, *Tuath is Tighearna*, 112; Meek, *Caran an t-Saoghail*, 480.

⁵⁸ The lines in the song that might have been seen as having the potential to upset the Highland gentry were: 'Rinn uachdrain am fuadach/ Gu fada null thar chuantan/ Am fearann chaidh thoirt uapa/ 'S thoirt suas do na fèidh'. (The chiefs expelled them/ Far across the oceans/ The land taken from them/ And given up to the deer). When 'Fionn' first published the song in *The Celtic Lyre* in 1886, he translated these lines as: 'To make room for the sportsman/ Their lands were all taken/ And they had to seek out/ New homes o'er the waves'. The word 'uachdrain' was not translated at all. See *The Celtic Lyre*, ed. by Henry Whyte, (Edinburgh: MacLachlan & Stewart, 1886), 46; and Notes to 'Fuadach nan Gàidheal' in Meek, *Caran an t-Saoghail*, 468–469.

⁵⁹ 'The Recent Gaelic Concert at Oban', *OT*, 19 Sept 1896.

Gaidheal' would be one of the songs she would sing. [...] She was pleased to find the song [was] admirably suited to her voice. [...] It must have been very aggravating to that accomplished artiste to be told that a song on which she had bestowed such pains could not be sung.⁶⁰

His final epistolary comment was to suggest that if those responsible were going to object to every Gaelic song likely to disturb the sensitive minds of landlords, 'they will reduce their concerts to the literary level of the modern music hall'. It is not clear who had voiced concern about the singing of 'Fuadach nan Gàidheal' at this particular concert. The Reverend Dr Alexander Stewart, who went under the pen name 'Nether Lochaber', ex-Provost McIsaac of Oban, along with Lord Archibald Campbell, who chaired the event, were the main organisers of the concert and one or all of them might have taken 'cold feet' over the song. Certainly Jessie MacLachlan was not implicated in the decision, being referred to as 'that most charming cantatrice of our national melodies' by Dr Donald MacGregor,⁶¹ who also contributed his candid comments in support of 'Fionn'.⁶² The controversy was illustrative of the simmering tensions that caused friction between different Gaelic networks with regard to the place given to members of the Highland land-owning class in the Gaelic movement at this time, an opposition that frequently played out between the Gaelic activists who were self-educated and those who had successfully managed to gain university honours and who were now seen as comfortably and conservatively middle-class.⁶³ It was a game of bluster and one-up-man-ship, fluctuating enmities and loyalties, which the newly-arrived women often unsettled by their ability to negotiate around and between the different factions, as was indeed the case in this instance. A few weeks later the 'Glasgow Letter' in the *OT*, penned by 'Fionn', intimated that Miss Jessie MacLachlan had brought together a company for a grand Celtic concert to be held in the City Hall, Glasgow, and not only was she going to sing 'Fuadach nan Gàidheal' but she was to present everyone in the audience with a copy of the song – the words given in Gaelic and English, and with

⁶⁰ *OT*, 19 Sept 1896.

⁶¹ The Pro-crofter Liberal MP who defeated Charles Fraser-Mackintosh in the 1892 General Election.

⁶² *OT*, 26 Sept 1896.

⁶³ Donald E. Meek refers to Henry Whyte as an example of a self-educated Gaelic activist. See 'Alexander Carmichael and Celtic Christianity' in *The Life & Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, ed. by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (Port of Ness: The Islands Book Trust, 2008), 82–95 (92).

music in both notations.⁶⁴ Thus ‘Fionn’ had his song reinstated on the concert platform and Jessie MacLachlan managed to accommodate her personal loyalties across the class spectrum of her Gaelic friends, audiences and patrons.

The Patriotic Platform

Although Jessie MacLachlan trained in oratorio and popular opera in Glasgow and London, she chose to make a career in bringing the songs of Scotland to an audience to whom she felt the true interpretation of what she termed ‘Scotch folk-song’ was unknown. The reason behind this particular philosophy may have been that she had toured for a season in 1896 with the well-known Scottish music-hall entertainer Harry Lauder,⁶⁵ and her desire to promote a different image of Scotland may have been a reaction against his comical music-hall repertoire. In particular a stereotypical view of the Gaelic-speaking Highlander was frequently part of that entertainment genre, with the comic presenters themselves appearing in exaggerated Highland Dress. She may also have recoiled from the view of women, including Highland women, that was at times presented in the sketches and songs of the music-hall stage.⁶⁶

When Jessie MacLachlan set off on her first overseas tour of the United States and Canada in January 1901, leaving from Central Station in Glasgow bound for Liverpool, she attracted crowds of well-wishers and representatives of many clan societies and kindred associations, ‘who were most enthusiastic in the heartiness of their send-off’.⁶⁷ She toured for three months on this occasion, returning home in the autumn, and toured almost every year thereafter, undertaking extensive schedules in Australia and New Zealand in 1905 and 1907, with her final tour to Canada and the United States in 1914. At a ‘Welcome Home Concert’ in Glasgow in October 1903, the singer told the audience that: ‘Since [they last met] she had sung at some three hundred concerts, and had come into contact with thousands of Gaelic-speaking Highlanders in Canada and the United States’.⁶⁸ There was, therefore, a strong perception of Jessie MacLachlan as an envoy of sorts, a tangible link between the

⁶⁴ ‘Our Glasgow Letter’, *OT*, 31 Oct 1896.

⁶⁵ Sir Harry Lauder, *Between You and Me* (London: Greening, 1907), 54.

⁶⁶ See Paul Maloney, *Scotland and the Music Hall 1850–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 159–163.

⁶⁷ ‘Departure of Miss Jessie N. MacLachlan’, *OT*, 12 Jan 1901.

⁶⁸ ‘Glasgow Highland Welcome to Miss MacLachlan’, *OT*, 14 Oct 1903.

Gaelic community in Glasgow in particular and the Gaelic diaspora of the various cities and towns where she toured throughout the world.

Jessie MacLachlan's repertoire on her concert tours was chiefly aimed at the expatriate Scottish community, although her publicity was careful to reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the English-speaking diaspora in general and to present an inclusive loyalty, stating that '[Miss MacLachlan's] song programmes give place to the gems of Scottish, English and Irish song', adding that, 'naturally, perhaps, the pride of place is given to Gaelic songs'.⁶⁹ The singer herself described her national affiliation as 'Scotch, and of the Highlands, but a Britisher'.⁷⁰ This was not a conflicting loyalty, and reflected the general position of many Gaelic-speaking Highlanders of the time.⁷¹ Her programme in the colonies often concluded with the imperial anthem 'Rule Britannia', and on one occasion in Brisbane a letter was published in the press with regard to this, asking: 'Had [Miss MacLachlan] forgotten that at Culloden Field, Charles Edward was defeated by the Duke of Cumberland?'. In reply, Jessie MacLachlan diplomatically countered by saying that she had always been taught to love her neighbour, thus deflecting the criticism without personal compromise.⁷² Clearly her repertoire on tour was shaped to appeal to an inclusive loyalty that encompassed Scottish, Irish, British and imperial patriotism, allowing the audience to unite in a 'feel good' sense of belonging. What made Jessie MacLachlan's repertoire different from that of most other Scottish performers on the colonial circuit was that she included Gaelic songs within this diverse cultural programme, and Gaelic was therefore one of the range of identities and loyalties presented. The Gaelic flag was not eclipsed by the Scottish patriotic banner, thus offering a more balanced view of Scottish culture, in which Gaelic was given a distinctive place. This can be contrasted with other Scottish acts of the time that prominently promoted the Highland imagery under the Scottish label in a way that gave no recognition to a specific Gaelic language and identity.

⁶⁹ 'Miss Jessie MacLachlan', *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 20 May 1905.

⁷⁰ *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 20 May 1905.

⁷¹ See Donald E. Meek, ed., *Caran an t-Saoghail* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), xxii–xxiii.

⁷² 'Social News and Gossip', *Sydney Mail*, 7 June 1905.

The Ambassadorial Platform

After her debut concert under the auspices of the Gaelic Society of London in 1889, Jessie MacLachlan sang regularly at its gatherings throughout her life. Noting the success of her first North American tour in 1901, the Society realized the potential of the singer to be an ambassador for their ‘Scheme for the encouragement of the Teaching of Gaelic in Highland Schools’; a golden opportunity to bring the enterprise to the attention of large numbers of Gaelic sympathisers on the other side of the Atlantic. The philanthropic overtones of the project would have provided an acceptable cloak of femininity for what was basically a money-raising exercise and consequently the Society announced in a leaflet about the scheme that – ‘Miss Jessie N. MacLachlan has kindly consented to endeavour to raise subscriptions during her [1902] tour in Canada and America’.⁷³ The *Oban Times*, which followed Jessie MacLachlan’s career with partisan interest, subsequently reported that she had forwarded a cheque for £46.14s to the Gaelic Society of London on behalf of the Gaelic Education Fund, and published the letter that she enclosed with the money:

It affords me the greatest pleasure to hand you this sum towards that most worthy object, as a first contribution from our Celtic friends over there. [...] I am proud to say that on the other side our grand old language is spoken almost everywhere, but specially in our own Canada and I must say here that a more enthusiastic Celt than the Canadian would indeed be difficult to find. After my next colonial tour I hope to be able to send you a further substantial contribution, and meantime with heart and voice ever devoted to the cause,

I am, sincerely yours, (Sgd.) Jessie N. MacLachlan.⁷⁴

In connection with her 1902 tour which included the Canadian Maritimes of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, a letter from Jessie MacLachlan to Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair (1840–1924), gives a sense of her ambassadorial style:

Our tour thro the lower provinces has been of very special interest [and] pleasure to us, for I have not been asked or expected to speak the language of the “Sassanach”. It has done my heart good to meet so

⁷³ Nova Scotia Archives: Gaelic Resources, ‘Letter from Jessie N. MacLachlan’, <<http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/gaelic/archives.asp?ID=70&page=200600449>> [accessed 27 January 2012]

⁷⁴ *OT*, 28 Nov 1903.

many loyal Highlanders, [and] I will carry back with me [...] many affectionate and kindly memories of my Highland friends in this part of the country.⁷⁵

Referring to the Gaelic Society circular enclosed with her letter, she commented that: 'We have lost so much in days gone by, that we are to make a herculean effort to perpetuate our language', and signing the letter 'Tha mi Do char[a]id dileas, Seònaid Nic Lachlainn'.⁷⁶ Her incorrect use of Gaelic, and the English idiom it reflects in this example, would suggest that Jessie MacLachlan was not schooled in the language and unaccustomed to writing in it at even a very basic level, although she was described as 'an excellent Gaelic speaker with the true Lorne ring'.⁷⁷

There were two other female Gaelic-speaking singers on the professional concert platform circuit at the same time as Jessie MacLachlan, although neither of them toured to the same extent or achieved such a high public profile. Flora F. Donaldson (b.1868), a Glasgow Highlander with Gaelic-speaking parents from South Uist and Caithness, was described on a tour of New Zealand in 1904 as an 'English and Gaelic Prima Donna and Goldmedalist',⁷⁸ and while she included Gaelic song in her repertoire, she does not appear to have attached any wider significance to this. Iona Robertson (b.1863), on the other hand, who was also a Glasgow Highlander, did promote the Gaelic cause in her platform performances. On departing for a Canadian tour in 1906, a press report announced that: 'Miss Robertson's work not only in connection with Gaelic music but in fostering a love for the Gaelic language is a valuable asset to the Highlands generally'.⁷⁹ She included an appeal for financial support for An Comunn Gàidhealach on the front of her concert programmes, and emphasised the importance of the language movement in a prefatory note. In a letter to Malcolm MacFarlane sent from Canada, Iona Robertson referred to having successfully got branches of An Comunn Gàidhealach started in Winnipeg, Montreal and Halifax.⁸⁰ Her letter gives an insight into the sheer

⁷⁵ Jessie N. MacLachlan to Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair, 20 Oct 1902. Nova Scotia Archives: Gaelic Resources, (See note 72, above).

⁷⁶ Jessie N. MacLachlan to Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair, 20 Oct 1902. (See note 72, above).

⁷⁷ 'A Famous Gaelic Vocalist', *OT*, 20 May 1916.

⁷⁸ 'Scotland in Song and Story', *Hawera & Normamby Star*, 7 Oct 1904.

⁷⁹ 'Iona Robertson leaving for Canada', *OWN*, 27 June 1906.

⁸⁰ Iona Robertson, Toronto, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 29 Nov 1906. NLS Acc. 9736/137.

hard work and strenuous travelling that these tours entailed, and also reveals that the three Gaelic singers were often on a similar concert circuit and, from her perspective at least, that there was a degree of rivalry between them:

Flora Donaldson [...] is here with a troupe, [...] a ventriloquist; & a funny man. You know the sort of third or fourth rate style. [...] Everywhere we've been, critics have said we're the "best, most refined, finished Scottish artistes who have ever appeared in Canada!!! That's rough on Jessie?"⁸¹

Iona Robertson's tour began in the autumn and went on through the winter months and into the following year. At the end of what was a long letter to MacFarlane, and may in fact have been written over a period of time, it appears that she could no longer sustain her characteristic ebullience:

I hate Canada - & am very homesick. I want "mo dhachaidh" and "mo mhàthair". I catch cold upon cold [...] but as we have come we must stay and "make good" for another year and I must work for "An Comunn" but I hate the long days and nights on trains.⁸²

However, in an 'official' letter sent from Toronto to the London Argyllshire Association and published in the *Oban Weekly News*, she assumed an unofficial ambassadorial voice on behalf of the 'Land of Promise', painting a picture of a land of opportunity with plenty of work and a quick route to prosperity. She described meeting the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, D. C. Fraser, – 'one of the finest of Highlanders' – who had asked her to 'use [her] influence to encourage immigration'.⁸³ Once back home she brought the message 'to come to the Land of Promise' onto the concert platform and in an interlude during her Programme, offered encouragement and advice towards this aim, finishing with a rendering of the Canadian national anthem – 'The Maple Leaf for Ever'.⁸⁴ Jessie MacLachlan similarly took on this 'reverse' ambassadorial role at home, offering first-hand information on various countries to those in her audiences who might be considering emigration. She remarked to an audience in Christchurch that: 'She had met people

⁸¹ Iona Robertson to Malcolm MacFarlane, 29 Nov 1906. NLS Acc. 9736/137.

⁸² Iona Robertson, Toronto, to Malcolm MacFarlane, 29 Nov 1906. NLS Acc. 9736/137.

⁸³ 'Canada – The Land of Promise: Interesting letter from Miss Iona Robertson', *OWN*, 5 Dec 1906.

⁸⁴ 'Glasgow Letter', *OWN*, 27 March 1907.

in Scotland who appeared to have strange notions of New Zealand and she had repeatedly been asked absurd questions concerning the people of the colony'.⁸⁵ These women were uniquely placed to act as interactive ambassadors between the Gaelic communities at home and abroad, and their potential in this role was clearly recognised.

The Home Platform

Women who embraced the public platform in any way in this period were subject to critical scrutiny. Walking the social tightrope between the polarities of perceptions of womanly and unwomanly behaviour in the public eye was a balancing act at which they became adept. At her annual concert in Glasgow, Flora F. Donaldson was praised by the chairman for her 'high musical position' but also for the fact that 'all along she had conducted herself as a woman should do'.⁸⁶ The home platform could be particularly critical, and when Iona Robertson was heard to have connections with the Women Suffragists, the local press in Oban, where she had family connections, was quick to sense a story, and the headline 'Miss Iona Robertson as Suffragette'⁸⁷ was clearly aimed at arousing local interest. When she went to Oban in the summer of 1906 to rest before her overseas tour, she was interviewed on the subject of her suffragist interest. Described as 'the famous Gaelic *diva*', Iona Robertson was non-committal on her suffrage involvement, neither refuting nor agreeing, although admitting that she was a friend of 'Mrs Montefiore',⁸⁸ stating that 'She is a particularly clever and interesting lady and I always enjoy her society thoroughly'. However, she skilfully managed to turn the idea of commitment to a cause towards Gaelic so that it was reported that: 'Iona Robertson has only one prejudice – the Gaelic language. For that tongue she would slave and scheme with all the resources of a fanatic on the subject that she frankly admits she is'.⁸⁹ The report did not pursue the matter any further and moved on to discuss the singer's forthcoming Canadian tour. From her letters to Malcolm MacFarlane it is clear that Iona Robertson had an interest in politics and she was a supporter of the women's suffrage movement. She wrote in one letter that she had joined the Independent Labour Party and the Ethical

⁸⁵ 'Miss Jessie MacLachlan', *The Star* [NZ], 24 July 1907.

⁸⁶ 'Miss F. Donaldson's Concert', *OT*, 25 Feb 1899.

⁸⁷ 'Miss Iona Robertson as Suffragette', *OWN*, 18 July 1906.

⁸⁸ Dora Montefiore (1851–1933), a member of the Women's Social and Political Union; a radical and leading supporter of women's suffrage.

⁸⁹ *OWN*, 18 July 1906.

Society and added that: '[I] [a]m lecturing at each on the state of the highlands & the Crofters etc'.⁹⁰

A public career on the concert platform was dependent on various support networks, and a degree of circumspection, as illustrated here, was necessary to avoid attracting negative publicity. The patronage of the more prestigious Highland Societies at home was an important source of support for the women singers. Although Jessie MacLachlan was Argyllshire born and bred, she was associated in particular with the Gaelic Society of London, while the London Argyllshire Association supported Iona Robertson. On occasions, however, the Gaelic Society of London had both singers on the same Programme, although Jessie MacLachlan was always given the main billing.⁹¹ There was a degree of loyalty and duty expected of the singers in return for the promotional support of the prestigious societies in the form of being available to sing at special concerts, and to an extent their fund-raising efforts on tour were also part of this expectation, although the singers were clearly also personally motivated in this direction.

Despite the fact that she was regularly touring around the globe, Jessie MacLachlan did not neglect the Gaelic audience at home in Scotland, bringing the glamour of her professional world to the Gaelic platform. In an interview on BBC Gaelic radio in 1985, Sìne NicLabhrainn recalled that in 1913 her mother had obtained permission for her to be absent from school in order to go to the Dundee Mòd to see and hear Jessie MacLachlan singing at the closing concert, and she could still, some seventy years later, vividly recall the impression the singer made:

Bha i àrd agus uabhasach snasail [...] 'S e gùn uaine a bh' oirre agus trèana air, agus thàinig i dìreach mar gum biodh fìor bhan-rìghinn, fada nas coltaiche ri banrigh na bha Bhictoria. [...] Agus bha an duine aice leatha an oidhche sin. Thug e staigh i chun a' phlatform. [...] Agus a' chiad òran a chuala mi i a' gabhail an oidhche sin, 's e 'Mo Dhachaigh'. Bha i sònraichte dìreach. Chan eil cuimhne agam dè na h-òrain eile a ghabh i, ach tha cuimhne agam gu bràth air a cluinntinn a' gabhail 'Mo Dhachaigh'.⁹²

⁹⁰ Iona Robertson, West Kensington, to Malcolm MacFarlane, [no date]. NLS Acc. 9736/134.

⁹¹ For example, they both sang for the Gaelic Society of London in October 1903 and May 1906. (*The Scotsman*, 3 Oct 1903; *Musical Standard*, 26 May 1906)

⁹² 'Bliadhna nan Òran: Seasaidh Niven NicLachlainn',
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/alba/oran/people/seasaidh_niven_niclachlainn/> [Accessed 20 Jan 2012]

‘Mo Dhachaidh’ was a contemporary song written by Malcolm MacFarlane, which became Jessie MacLachlan’s ‘signature’ song at home and abroad. The lyrics presented a sentimental and comforting picture of a domestic idyll in a pastoral setting but with a surprisingly rousing melody to accompany it. It was not however just the emotional power of her Gaelic singing that made Jessie MacLachlan’s performance memorable but that she presented Gaelic song in a sophisticated and glamorous performance setting and thus communicated a positive message for the language and its place in the modern world.

New Platforms

Through the emerging technology of gramophone recording in the final years of the nineteenth century, a new and important platform was offered to Jessie MacLachlan. In expanding the Berliner Gramophone Company to London in the late 1890s, Emile Berliner, a German who had, a decade earlier, developed the gramophone in America, sent a sound engineer to Glasgow scouting for singing talent to record on disc records. Thus on the fifth of September 1899, Fred Gaisberg noted in his work diary: ‘Start record-taking with Miss Jennie [*sic*] MacLoughlan [*sic*] the first singer of Scotch songs in Scotland. Mr Buchanan, her husband, will act as our regular accompanist’.⁹³ One of the songs Jessie MacLachlan recorded on that occasion was ‘Mo Dhachaidh’, the first Gaelic song to be put on a gramophone record, at a time when the concept was so new that it attracted considerable interest around the world. She later made further recordings in Paris with Pathé Frères in 1904. In her successful singing career, Jessie MacLachlan did not need to include Gaelic in her repertoire, but she chose to remain loyal to her Gaelic roots and to her Highland name, declining to adopt a professional ‘stage’ name, and in all her platform opportunities she promoted Gaelic song as part of her standard repertoire.

In January 1910, when singing in Toronto at the invitation of the Caledonian Society there, Jessie MacLachlan made the following philosophical comment about her career: ‘A vocalist’s opportunity is to-day. The record of a singer’s work is not to

⁹³ Hugo Strötbaum, ed., *The Fred Gaisberg Diaries* (2010)
 <http://www.recordingpioneers.com/docs/GAISBERG_DIARIES_1.pdf> [Accessed 25 Feb 2010]
 One of the Gaelic songs she recorded on this occasion – ‘Ho Ro Mo Nigheann Donn Bhoidheach’ – is reproduced on: 60 Years of Scottish Gaelic 1899–1959, 2012. CD FA 5359

be found on the printed page. [...] My work is now. The night of a brief span soon cometh. But today I am here. The fire within burns impatiently'.⁹⁴ The words were strangely prophetic as Jessie MacLachlan died in 1916, in her fiftieth year. The Dundee Mòd in 1913 was her last performance on a home platform, after which she toured Canada and the United States, with her final concert in New York before an audience of 5000 in March 1914.⁹⁵ On her return journey from this tour, the singer and her husband holidayed in France and were caught up in the outbreak of the First World War, eventually managing to escape to Spain before experiencing an arduous voyage home on a cargo steamer. Jessie MacLachlan's health suffered as a result of this ordeal, but it is probable that the years of intensive singing engagements and travelling in extremes of weather also took their toll.

Chapter Conclusions

In discussing women who promoted the Gaelic cause in public performance contexts, this chapter has highlighted in particular the different platforms of Màiri Mhòr nan Òran and Jessie N. MacLachlan. Despite the tartan-clad enthusiasm of the Scottish diaspora in the colonies and the United States, Jessie MacLachlan was not tempted to embrace that image in her appearance and production, but rather presented herself and her repertoire in a modern and professional performance setting. As a strikingly attractive woman she chose often quite revealing but always very tasteful dresses to wear on the platform, in the style of the operatic divas of the day. At the same time, however, her Gaelic identity was an important part of that image, emphasised in interviews and in her prominent inclusion of Gaelic songs in her repertoire. She thus communicated a modern perspective on both the Gaelic language and Gaelic women to her various audiences around the world. Importantly, however, it was a platform performance that still resonated with a Gaelic audience at home and promoted a sense of indigenous confidence at a time when it was sorely needed.

⁹⁴ 'Gaelic Prima Donna', *Marlborough Express*, 5 Jan 1910.
 <<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=MEX19100105.2.8>> [accessed 24 Jan 2012]

⁹⁵ 'In Memoriam: The Scottish Prima Donna', *Celtic Annual*, (1918–1919), 27–28 (28).

While the contrasting appearance of Màiri Mhòr and Jessie MacLachlan at the first Mòd in 1892 was noted at the start of this chapter, both women used their bodies and style of dress on the platform to empower their feminine presence and to challenge established gender understandings and hierarchies. Màiri Mhòr's impressive tartan-clad figure allowed her to have a platform presence that was notably feminine while appropriating the heroic and male symbolic associations of the 'breacan', and also promoting a personal and generic pride in the skill and artistry of women's home-spun tweed.⁹⁶ Her use of symbolic signification can further be seen in the gifts of her own handiwork to prominently active men in the Gaelic cause, and in her marking of significant moments with public gestures. This aspect of her activism, and in particular its connection to her proficiency in the making of tweed, has not been given any great attention, and yet it draws on the same symbolism and imagery as her poetry. Somhairle MacGill-eain wrote of Màiri Mhòr's poetic imagery that 'Very often those images are symbols as well, symbols of the lost Skye of her youth, or what is left of it, or of the sad change, or the new hope. Very likely, she herself did not realise how often her images became symbols'.⁹⁷ The transfer of similar symbolic understandings to her tartan dress, or to a tweed suit, or even gifts of heather or oatcakes, would be quite natural to someone whose thought process worked in that way, and as suggested in the quote above, it need not always be that the connection was made in a conscious way.

Màiri Mhòr is today remembered as a prominent figure in the public arena of Gaelic political and cultural activism in the 1880s and early 1890s, and her songs still resonate with contemporary singers and audiences. Yet, despite all the attention, she still remains an enigmatic and complex figure and as this chapter has highlighted, a gender perspective can offer another dimension to an understanding of her political and cultural activism as well as her poetry. Jessie MacLachlan, in contrast, is now little known. Certainly, she died in her prime in 1916 in the middle of the turmoil of the War, although her singing style and the particular songs she sang continued to be popular after the War, and had she lived she may well have continued on the Gaelic platform while her voice lasted. However, hers was a

⁹⁶ The poet refers in 'Eilean a' Cheò' to 'S na mnathan-taighe guanach/ A' dèanamh uaill nan clò' (The light-hearted housewives, taking pride in their home-spun cloth). See Meek, *Màiri Mhòr nan Òran*, 106–118 (107).

⁹⁷ Mac Gill-eain, 'Màiri Mhòr nan Òran', in *Ris a' Bhruthaich*, 250–257 (257).

singing style that would eventually seem dated and indeed quite alien to Gaelic singing, although it was popular with Gaelic-speaking audiences at the time. This does not diminish Jessie MacLachlan's contribution to the wider appreciation of Gaelic in her day and for which she should be remembered. In 1904, reporting that the singer was recording 'Scotch and Gaelic Songs' for Pathé Frères in Paris, the *OT* commented: 'It will be, therefore, possible for those who have never had an opportunity of hearing "Smeorach nan Gaidheal" to form some idea of her attainments in the field of melody'.⁹⁸ In the recordings that survive of her singing it is still possible to appreciate the quality of Jessie MacLachlan's voice and thus to imagine its powerful impact in the context of her platform performance.

⁹⁸ 'Our Gaelic Prima Dona', *OT*, 6 Feb 1904.



Plate 10: Jessie N. MacLachlan at the first
Mòd in 1892. *Celtic Monthly*, 1 (1892-93), 11.



Plate 11.

National Library of Australia, (nla-pic-an22966007-v)



From Photo by D. Whyte, Inverness.

Plate 12: Màiri Mhòr nan Òran.

Frontispiece in *Dain agus Orain Ghaidhlig* (Inverness: A. & U. Mac-Coinnich, 1891).



From Photo by D. Whyte, Inverness.

Plate 13. (*Dain agus Orain Ghaidhlig*, 192).

8

Conclusion

Rinn bhur n-iarrtas a tha cho blàth agus beothail, rinn bhur n-eud a tha cho seasmhach is dùrachdach a' mhuinntir a bha mi-chùramach a dhùsgadh, a' mhuinntir a bha meagh-bhlàth a theòthadh, a' mhuinntir a bha lag-chridheach neartachadh, agus mar so chuir sibh spionnadh is neart an aobhar is an toil na muinntir a bha ag cur a' chatha air sgàth na Gàidhlig.

By your glowing and infectious enthusiasm, your fervent and untiring zeal, you have roused the apathetic, stimulated the luke-warm, encouraged the faint-hearted, braced the will and strengthened the purpose of those who have been waging the fight for Gaelic.¹

In 1933, Margaret Burnley Campbell was honoured by An Comunn Gàidhealach for 'all that she had done on behalf of the Gaelic movement over thirty years', and presented with a testimonial written in Gaelic and English, enclosed in a specially bound album decorated with Celtic lettering and patterns (Plate 14, 249). Along with a number of the women who have featured in this study, the woman who was at the helm of An Comunn Gàidhealach between 1907 and 1909, and whose leadership secured the immediate financial future of the organisation, has all but disappeared from any discussion of the activities of the Gaelic movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and therefore the extent and significance of their diverse participation and contribution has not been recognised. The aim of this study has been to redress this record, and through a detailed examination of individual women, the contexts of their participation and the wider social networks that supported them,

¹ Both the Gaelic text and the translation in 'Presentation to Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale', *OT*, 13 May 1933.

to recover and reappraise the involvement of women in the Gaelic movement in the period between the passing of The Crofting Act and the Great War.

In pursuing this aim, the study adopted two fields of vision. The wide-angled view framed the main areas of Gaelic cultural activity through which efforts were being made to promote and progress the Gaelic language and culture, and highlighted the prominent figures involved. These different arenas provided the contexts of the individual chapters. The close focus has been on the women themselves, the scope of their Gaelic activity, their individual perspectives and motivations, and the different social and family networks with which they interacted. In this way the study has revealed patterns of overlapping friendships, family loyalties and informal social alliances that provided individual women with the support, inspiration and opportunity that encouraged and empowered their Gaelic activism.

The individual chapters explored six areas of Gaelic cultural activity in two groupings: chapters 2, 3 and 4 considered areas of organisational activity where participation was subject to committees and official hierarchies, and where women's participation could be limited by these strictures; chapters 5, 6 and 7, in contrast, examined activity that was more individual and personally initiated, although supported by informal social and family networks. It was the case, however, that there was considerable overlap between the organisational activity and individual initiatives; for example, Mary MacKellar's personal literary endeavours were wide-ranging, but she also had a literary role with the Gaelic Society of Inverness, or indeed, Ella Carmichael, whose involvement was both individual and organisational.

Chapter 2 showed that An Comunn Gàidhealach was at the forefront of Gaelic cultural activities in this period, and was a forum in which a small group of women were able to access the cultural sphere of the Gaelic movement in the early 1900s and from there to expand their influence within the broad scope of its activities. The advent of women in An Comunn was described by T. M. Murchison in an overview of the history of the organisation in 1955: 'Beginning in 1902 with Miss Ella C. Carmichael (later Mrs W. J. Watson) several capable women served on the Executive, the most notable being Mrs Margaret Burnley Campbell of Ormidale,

one of the greatest leaders An Comunn has ever had'.² Margaret Burnley Campbell was indeed a 'capable woman', initially driven in her activism for Gaelic by a sense of her historic family roots in Argyll, and from that perspective a desire to ensure the language would continue in order to maintain a distinctive cultural identity and individuality. While she was already challenging gender perceptions in running her family estate and as the chair of her local school board, nevertheless, it was still remarkable that she was elected president of An Comunn in 1907, although the catalyst for this was certainly her overseeing of the organisation of Féill a' Chomuinn Ghàidhealaich in the same year. The financial success of this venture was crucial for the future of An Comunn and its work, and for that alone Margaret Burnley Campbell's contribution was significant. Her ambition for 'An Clachan' at the Scottish Exhibition in 1911 was equally successful financially with the profits enabling the work of Highland Home Industries to be consolidated on a business footing for the first time, rather than as a philanthropic venture under aristocratic control. Margaret Burnley Campbell used the authority of her role as president to travel all over Scotland, addressing Gaelic groups and societies, and encouraging the setting up of local branches of An Comunn, and in that way became very visible as a woman on the Gaelic platform.

The interaction between An Comunn Gàidhealach and its cultural counterparts in Ireland and Wales through reciprocal attendance at their annual festivals was an important forum for women to find inspiration and encouragement. The passionate platform orations of Agnes O'Farrelly in particular, but also Gwyneth Vaughan, who were visiting delegates at the Mòd on a number of occasions, promoted a positive image of confident public women in the Irish and Welsh language movements. Irish influence is evident in the activism of both Margaret Burnley Campbell and Ella Carmichael, who brought back a number of innovative ideas from various Irish visits and which they were keen to implement in support of Gaelic. Their enthusiasm often met with opposition but they were tenacious in finding ways of surmounting these set-backs. The Summer Schools, the use of the Direct Method of language teaching, Gaelic drama productions and performances of

² Rev T. M. Murchison, 'Story of An Comunn: Re-Organisation and New Ventures, 1902–1914', AG, 50 (1955), 62–64 (63).

tableaux vivants were all inspired by the Irish example, and these were also activities that were entirely led by women or in which women took prominent roles.

Margaret Burnley Campbell's particular interest in education evidenced in her school board involvement gave her an informed perspective that allowed her to confidently embrace An Comunn's work in that particular area along with Ella Carmichael and Winifred Parker. In this aspect they were party to official lobbying and parliamentary petitions on the fringes of the male world of politics. However, as chapter 3 showed, while the official campaigns in support of Gaelic education are documented in parliamentary papers and press reports, it is more difficult to identify the extent of less-public, individual efforts to promote Gaelic education within local situations. The school board activity of Lettice Macnaughten on behalf of Gaelic highlighted the individual idiosyncrasies of these bodies. Her somewhat bruising experience was in contrast to Margaret Burnley Campbell who, having a more influential social position in her locality, was able to progress her Gaelic aims in this forum. Chapter 3 also considered the example of a few women who made small gains for Gaelic within the scope of their teaching careers. Harriet Stewart in Drimnin who created her own Gaelic curriculum in her individual teaching situation may have been exceptional, but fragmentary evidence reveals that there were other Gaelic-speaking women teachers able and willing to use Gaelic in the classroom if they had been given encouragement. As has been noted elsewhere with reference to women's social history, it is often the case that when closer research is focused on a particular area of activity and more women are located, it becomes evident that 'exceptional' and 'extraordinary' are not always particularly relevant terms.³

Chapter 4 discussed the cultural activism of Ella Carmichael highlighting her aspirations for a modern Gaelic movement in which women were able to fully participate in the same ways as men. It was in response to the exclusively male Edinburgh University Celtic Society that she established the Celtic Union with her brother in 1894, and was therefore able to ensure gender parity from the start, and also to support inclusive Gaelic and Celtic interests. The artistic and scholarly Gaelic and Celtic Revival membership of the group, including her influential family networks, provided a supportive and sympathetic forum in which to implement her

³ Angela V. John, 'Beyond Paternalism: The Ironmaster's Wife in the Industrial Community' in *Our Mothers' Land*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 43–68 (62).

various Gaelic and Celtic initiatives. However, Ella Carmichael also encouraged the language in traditional ways through Gaelic classes and music, and much of this activity also interacted with her involvement in An Comunn Gàidhealach. Her pan-Celtic interests offered opportunity for wider cultural interaction and scholarly exchange, including friendships with like-minded women, and she was able to draw on these connections when she took on the editing of *The Celtic Review*. Ella Carmichael's Gaelic identity and her influential Gaelic connections, along with her own artistic and scholarly talent, and not least her beauty and poise, gave her a prominence and attention in Gaelic and Celtic revival circles that was at times almost overwhelming. She did, however, not spare herself in her work for Gaelic and was uncompromising in challenging any aspect of the Gaelic movement that, in practice or perspective, dismissed or limited women's participation in any way.

In chapter 5, the personal financial challenges faced by Mary MacKellar and Katherine Whyte Grant were discussed with reference to their literary aspirations for Gaelic, and their ambitions to make a living as writers. Mary MacKellar has sometimes been presented as anachronistic in her reluctance to address the reality of the political and social situation in the Gàidhealtachd in her day, but while aspects of her work certainly reflect this view, it was not an unusual one in the Gaelic poetic corpus of the time. As a female poet, she was, perhaps, more likely to be compared to her contemporary Mary MacPherson, and thus more vulnerable to this particular criticism. She did, however, respond to new literary opportunities that came her way, notably in her Gaelic phrase-book and her Gaelic-informed tourist guide-book, and further in her translation of Queen Victoria's Highland Diaries. She shared much with Mary MacPherson: her social circumstances, her schooling in the oral tradition, her experience of personal tribulation, her unflinching loyalty to a specific geographic location, and frequently finding herself a lone woman in a male-dominated arena. She has not, however, received the same attention as Màiri Mhòr and while it is clear that her work did not have the same lasting impact, yet the extent and variety of her literary work for Gaelic was important in her day and deserves closer examination. Màiri Mhòr's relationship to Skye, 'that glorious pride in her

own people and her own soil’,⁴ could equally be said of Mary MacKellar and Lochaber, and her devotion to Cameron of Loch Eil was part of that pride.

The innate sense of place that was a vital source of individual and cultural identity for Mary Mackellar and Màiri Mhòr, was also evident in the literary efforts of Katherine Whyte Grant, and a fundamental motivation for Frances Tolmie in her collecting of Gaelic songs and associated lore in her native ‘MacLeod Country’. It is not insignificant that all these women had experienced an active oral tradition in the communities of their youth, and their connection to this tradition was deeply felt, representing a microcosm of a landscape, a history and a community in a particular place, but also providing a temporal thread between past, present and future generations. They were also aware that this means of nurturing the deep cultural connection to a particular place and community was declining. In different literary formats, Mary MacKellar, Katherine Whyte Grant and Frances Tolmie, as discussed in chapter 6, all preserved a very personal record of the Gaelic oral traditions of their home districts, and brought a particularly female perspective and emphasis to that representation.

It is probably safe to say that out of all the women discussed in this study, it is Màiri Mhòr who has retained the most prominent historical identity and been given a degree of detailed scholarly attention, particularly in the context of her songs, a number of which have rightly maintained an iconic place in Gaelic repertoire. However, as chapter 7 showed, there is scope for a consideration of her work and her wider public activity in the land struggle from a gender perspective, particularly with regard to how she was represented or comprehended in press reports, and also in her symbolic use of her homespun tweed and tartan. In contrast to Màiri Mhòr, Jessie N. MacLachlan, who took Gaelic song onto prestigious concert platforms around the world, is little remembered or recalled today. When contemporary Gaelic singers compete for the women’s Gold Medal at the National Mòd, one of the prizes included in the competition is the ‘Jessie M. [*sic*] MacLachlan Memorial Prize’, the probable typing error in the initial letter of her middle name having continued unnoticed for some years. Jessie MacLachlan’s singing style and her Gaelic repertoire were relevant for a particular time in the

⁴ Somhairle Mac Gill-eain, ‘The Poetry of the Clearances’ in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich*, ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair, 1985), 48–74 (71).

development of urban Gaelic communities, and also for the sentiments of a wider colonial diaspora. However, in giving a prominent place to Gaelic song in a Scottish and British repertoire, she claimed a place for Gaelic on a broader cultural platform. While raising the profile of Gaelic in this way may seem irrelevant from today's perspective, comments from those closer to the moment, saw it differently:

[S]heinn i [...] òrain Ghaidhlig an lathair Ban-rìgh Victoria am Balmoral. Is mòr an togail agus an t-urram a thug sud do na h-òrain Ghaidhlig anns na làithean ud. Bha muinntir taingeil an uair sin, airson sochair de 'n seorsa, no airson dad sam bith a tharruingeadh aire na rìoghachd a dh'ionnsuidh na Gaidhlig agus a ciùil.⁵

Likewise, in the vivid and memorable impression the singer made on a young Gaelic-speaking girl in 1913,⁶ there is a sense of the real significance of Jessie MacLachlan in presenting Gaelic song as relevant in a modern performance context. From that perspective, she can be seen as the first in a line of female Gaelic singers who made a similar statement including, in more recent times, Anne Lorne Gillies, Karen Matheson and Julie Fowlis.

In their various initiatives and aspirations for Gaelic, the women featured in this study were actively seeking to progress the language in a modern world, and some of the ideas they were experimenting with are now seen as important areas for encouraging and sustaining the language. Katherine Whyte Grant's ambitions for colourful Gaelic books for young children and Ella Carmichael's experimentation with different dramatic genres, for example, as well as Margaret Burnley Campbell seeking to introduce modern methods of language learning, and her efforts to establish the Summer Schools to benefit Gaelic learners, teachers, and Gaelic-speaking communities alike, can all be recognised today in contemporary counterparts. It was perhaps in their innovative thinking with regard to ways of promoting and extending an appreciation of Gaelic to a number of different publics and in their ability to recognise the potential of modern cultural and artistic genres to benefit the Gaelic cause, that the women discussed here brought a refreshingly new dimension to the Gaelic movement in this period.

⁵ 'A'Cheud Mhod', AG, 29, (1933–34), 129–130 (129).

⁶ See chapter 7, 233.

One of the themes that this study has explored across all the chapters is the degree to which women were challenging traditional perceptions of female behaviour and femininity in their participation in the Gaelic movement and how this was perceived by the incumbent male hegemony. There was certainly opposition from some quarters, revealed in phrases such as ‘petticoat government’, ‘petticoat clique’, ‘petticoat bossing of the Gaelic cause’, and ‘suffragette president’,⁷ all used in private letters with reference to women’s active participation in An Comunn Gàidhealach. The ‘bluestocking’ jibe also appears, usually aimed at Ella Carmichael, who might have relished the association with the intellectual literary and artistic women for whom the term was originally used a century earlier.⁸ The sources of all these comments were John MacKay and Ruairidh Erskine. While the latter’s view on women in the Gaelic movement, and in An Comunn in particular, was certainly underpinned with his dislike and distrust for the gentry and upper classes, and their association with the Imperial cause, his gendered framing of this perspective presented a dismissive view of women and femininity in general:

Eadar an latha sin agus an latha diugh, ged a tha [An Comunn] banail is beusach gu leoir, tha a dhuinealas, a threoir, agus a churantachd air teicheadh. The e nis a’ gabhail tuillidh suim agus a’ cur tuillidh meas air a’ ghùn is a tha e a’ cur air an fhéilidh. Agus is soillear a bhlàth ri fhaicinn. Ceart mar a chaill Samson a neart air tàilleamh cleasachd agus tàladh bhan, amhuil sin An Comunn.⁹

Given this view, it is therefore very possible that Erskine was the source of a satirical cartoon amongst Malcolm MacFarlane’s papers (Plate 15, 250),¹⁰ in which the Gaelic language, depicted as the female ‘mother-tongue’, is being hoisted on a gibbet constructed from the elements that the artist implies are responsible for the ‘hanging’ and therefore the demise of the language. ‘Na Boireannaich’ (Women), along with An Comunn, the clergy, and the gentry or landowners, are clearly implicated as having contributed to the situation depicted, where ‘Gaelic’ appears to be drawing its last breath. Other men, however, were not so critical or obstructive in their views of women, and even Malcolm MacFarlane, whose combative temperament was easily

⁷ From letters in NLS Acc. 9736.

⁸ See Amanda Vickery, ‘Not just a pretty face’, *Guardian Review*, 8 March 2008.

⁹ ‘De tha cur air A’ Chomunn Ghaidhealach?’, *GB*, 8 (1911) 311–328.

¹⁰ NLS Acc.9736/65.

roused when his opinions were contradicted, appears to have been more relaxed with his numerous female correspondents. Not having access to his replies to the many forthright letters he received from women it is not possible to know how he reacted in these exchanges, particularly to the feminist-focused challenges of Ella Carmichael. However, what has been clear throughout the research for this study is that the 'Woman Question' disturbed traditional and cultural perceptions of femininity in a Gaelic cultural context as it did in society in general at this time. The issue had a sharper focus, certainly, during the militant period of the suffragettes, but the subject presents an interesting area for further research from a Gaelic perspective. Indeed there is much more to understand about women and Gaelic in this period and a number of aspects of this study warrant closer attention as has been highlighted at various points, including a fuller examination of some of the individual women who have featured most prominently in its chapters.

In investigating the Gaelic movement in this period from the perspective of the women involved, this study provides an alternative interpretation which looks beyond the dominant male personalities. It can often be the case that an assumption of male dominance presumes female anonymity,¹¹ perpetuated even today by contemporary scholars assuming that when there is only an initial in a name to go on, the person referred to must be male, as, for example, when E. C. Carmichael and A. C. Macdonnell are both described with a male pronoun.¹² However, as this study has clearly illustrated, these women and others were well known to their contemporaries in the Gaelic movement in their day.

The individual women who have been the main subject of this study differed in age, life experience and social and economic circumstances. They all shared, from a number of perspectives, a desire to see the Gaelic language and culture continue and prosper, and this study has presented the evidence to conclude that they were innovative, ambitious and wide-ranging in their efforts in support of this aim. It is also clear that at a time when women were seeking to extend their participation and influence in many areas of society, the Gaelic cultural sphere provided an

¹¹ See Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon, 'Introduction' in *Out of Bounds*, ed. by Esther Breitenbach and Eleanor Gordon (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 1–9 (3).

¹² E[lla] C. Carmichael in Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society 1893–1910* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 184.; and A[lice] C. Macdonnell in Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 73.

opportunity for them to progress both their individual aspirations as women and to further the cause of the Gaelic language and culture. In 1928, the year that universal women's suffrage became law in Britain, the Gaelic Summer School was revived by An Comunn Gàidhealach in Broadford in Skye. It was fourteen years since the last one had been held in Onich in 1914. Margaret Burnley Campbell, who had first suggested and initiated the Summer School idea in Roy Bridge in 1909, was among those present in 1928, described as 'that veteran worker in the Gaelic cause'. At the age of 71, she was still actively, if not as prominently, involved in the Gaelic movement, and she must have been delighted to see the Summer School being given a second chance. A few of the women who had pioneered female participation in the Gaelic movement before the War were still involved, although a number had died, and Ella Carmichael, in her fifties, would succumb to illness later that year. However, the legacy of the women who have been the subject of this study was that they had claimed a place in the Gaelic movement for the women who came after them, and as an enthusiastic report on the 1928 Summer School confirms, there were other women around who were similarly inspired to devote heart and voice to the Gaelic cause:

Language, art, songs, tramps, and ceilidhs – after four weeks in so wonderful an atmosphere, not one of us but left Skye more deeply attached than ever to the race we had sprung from, and more determined than ever to save all that is best in our ancient civilization. For that, one thing, and one thing only, is all-essential – the preservation of the Gaelic tongue.¹³

¹³ F. M. McNeill, 'Summer School in Broadford', *AG*, 23 (1928), 181–182.

Presentation to Mrs. Burnley Campbell of Ormidale.



The above is a reproduction in monochrome of a specimen page of the Book. The decoration enshrining the Address follows the true Celtic tradition of the best period in respect of style and treatment, where variety and elaboration are subservient to a basic unity—like our native piobaireachd. The highly developed and ornate initial letters are characteristically rendered, as are the interlaced and spiral *motifs*—portrayed in vivid and harmonious colourings—through which the style is expressed. In format and execution, the work reflects the influence of such examples as the famous books of Kells and Durrow.

Plate 14. 'Presentation to Mrs Burnley Campbell of Ormidale', *An Gaidheal*, 28 (1933), 132.

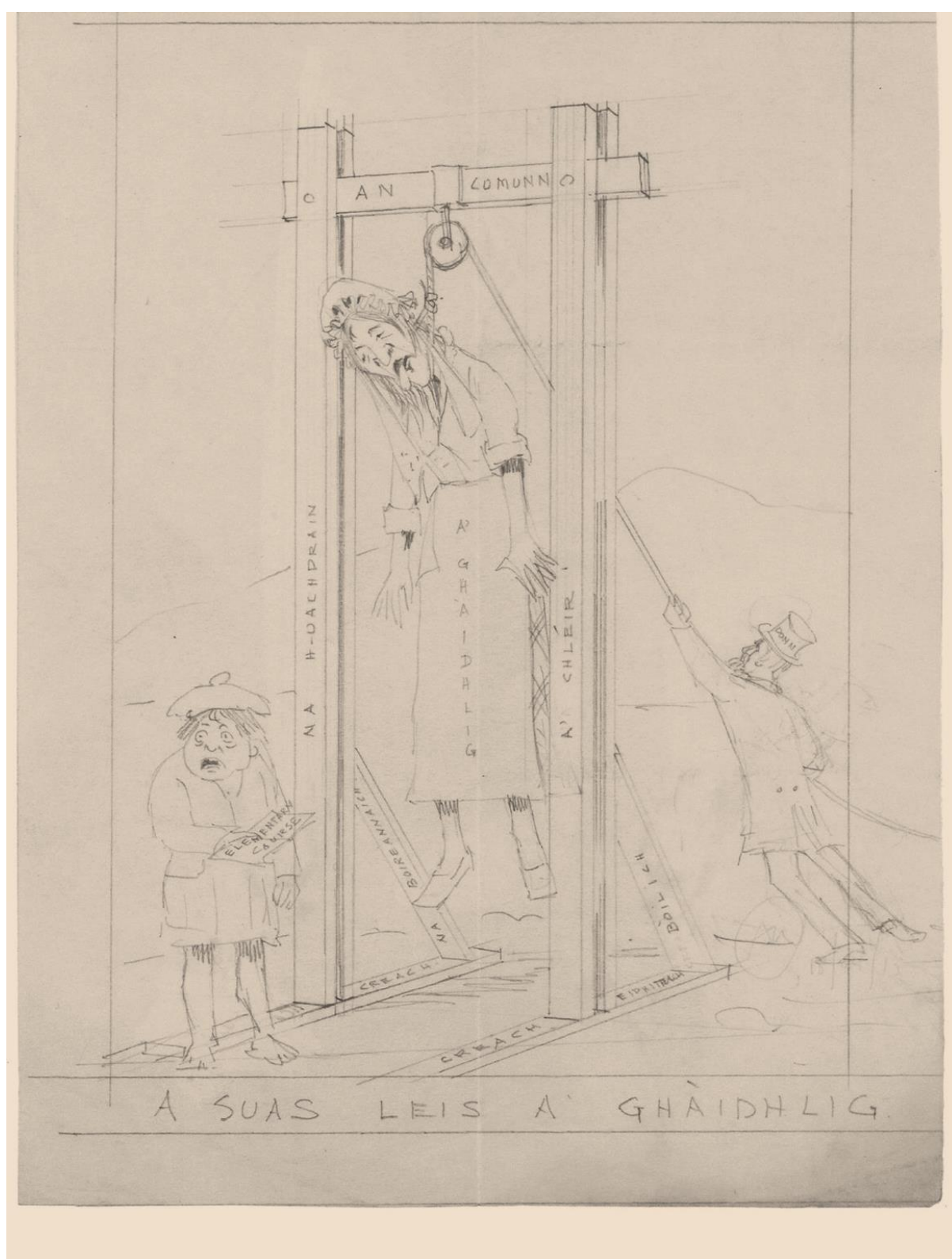


Plate 15. NLS Acc. 9736/65. Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland.

APPENDIX

Translations of Gaelic Passages

Chapter 1

1/p. 1:

Although great changes took place in the Gàidhealtachd at the time of Prince Charles Edward and which were damaging enough towards Gaelic, they were minor compared to those that have come upon the whole of Britain and indeed the whole world in the last two generations. The railways and electricity have been harnessed by the human-race. It is easier to go to the ends of the earth today than it was to go from Inverness to London before now. It is possible to speak comfortably one to another at a distance of a hundred miles. Information can go to Australia from London in two minutes. In this way, there is interaction between all races, and the differences that were between them are dissolving quickly away. This has brought about great change on the ‘Spirit of the Age’.

1/p. 8:

If a Highland State was given the opportunity to exist, everyone would have the right to vote, whether male or female, and whether rich or poor. It was not the habit of the Gaels to be contemptuous or disrespectful towards women just because they were women. They gave them every opportunity; and it was never ever cast up to them that they were lacking in reason, common sense, knowledge or ability to make judgements.

1/p. 10:

What more can the Comunn do unless it was to take a trip to London and, like the Suffragettes, set fire to some palace or other.

Chapter 2

2/p. 39, note 57:

It is clear to every wise man, that if they get the right [to vote], they will put the country completely off its course.

2/p. 55:

The Clachan is a very pleasant meeting-place to the Gaels, and there are a number of them back and forward every evening spending time in each other's company. Here old friendships are renewed, and new friendships made; here there is an opportunity for Gaels from city and country to come together from time to time in friendly conversation, giving and getting news of the country.

2/p. 55:

Many a person will be missing the friendly, warm, hospitable meetings that they had [there].

Chapter 3

3/p. 83

'[School-board members] that are kindly [disposed] towards Gaelic and who will promise that it will get a proper place as a subject in the school curriculum.

3/p. 87:

Mention has been made before now regarding the College that they are setting up across there [in Scotland] (A Gaelic Summer School). Mrs Burnley Campbell was across here last year at Cloughaneely so that she would see the College and the work in progress. She is one of the most hardworking women in Scotland for the Gaelic cause.

3/p. 88:

Picnics at Cnoc na Bealtaine and beside the river in the company of the other teachers, as well as cèilidhs, outdoor concerts, trips to Tory Island, bonfires and games of hurling at lunchtime.

3/p. 89:

The Gaelic of the inhabitants of Lochaber is as good as is to be found in Scotland and for that reason it is relevant that the summer-school should be held in this district.

3/p. 95–96:

I got a letter yesterday from the Lady of Ormidale (Mrs Burnley Campbell) [...] She said that An Comunn Gàidhealach are willing for me to go to Ireland for a month to learn the Direct Method of teaching Gaelic. And the Comunn are willing to pay my expenses, and to put a ‘substitute’ in my place in the school during that time, if I am willing – and it is an opportunity I will grasp with open arms, and if I get permission from the Director of Education, I will go in the spring to Dublin. Am I not lucky! But, it is too good to be true, and if our head-master can keep me back, I have no doubt he will do that.

3/p. 96:

The lady who is helping Dr Douglas Hyde in Dublin University promises me that she will take me to the schools and to the University to see Gaelic being taught, and I will enjoy that.

3/p. 99:

‘Stop! Stop! It is not English you are speaking – it is easy to recognise that your mother is not keeping up Gaelic with you’.

Chapter 4

4/p. 115–116:

And it is of the beloved Chief of the proud Society
That we sing, O harp of the strings,
The great philosopher, Blackie the gifted
Noble leader amongst a hundred!
[...]
A thousand welcomes to the Chief!

And to the joyful Comunn of the land of heather
 The northerly land of the strong men
 Who are heroes, as they always were.

4/p. 116:

Here is a toast of the fine Gael
 Whose inheritance it is to be brave,
 Great chief of the Progeny of Hector
 With whom it is customary to be noble.
 [...]
 A thousand welcomes to the chief
 Well-suited to wear the pleated kilt
 A sporran that is often opened
 By the hand that is not tight-fisted with money.
 [...]
 A long and a contented life
 I wish for the noble chief,
 And long may there be at his shoulder
 The lady of the golden hair!

4/p. 130:

The Cèilidh will be recalled in particular for the special entertainment that those present enjoyed. The French call it *tableaux* – that is translated as representation. There were one or two parts from the handsome tale that Carmichael gave us about Deirdre – and some portrayed the old heroes, appearing right before our eyes according to what happened in the story. [...] Every detail was done so well that all those present were extremely satisfied with what they saw and heard.

Chapter 5

5/p. 153:

And a shout of joy echoes
 Amongst the slopes and the distant bens
 And the children of Gael are like a thirsty people

Who receive fresh-water as is their desire.
 And your sweet praise of themselves and their land
 To be written in the language of the Fèinne.
 And Gaelic will now be valued
 though it would be said that its sun has set.

5/p. 159:

I put to the side the sort that are common in English and put together as best as I could the little rhymes that we used to say together when we played on the brae, and old Highland stories that are attractive in themselves and that should awaken love towards our Native-district, our Language and our Music.

5/p. 162:

Now it is English-only schools from one end of the country to the other. They are all under the same governing system. Some of the Lowland school-masters punish the children for every Gaelic word they say in the school. The majority of the children stop speaking Gaelic when they start going to school.

5/p. 173:

Although she writes with respect and fondness about the Gàidhealtachd, many people strongly doubt that she is a Highland woman at all. It is not difficult to see that she does not have a detailed knowledge of Gaelic and that she is not capable of either speaking or writing it accurately or correctly. She makes mistakes all over with regard to grammar and syntax. She stumbles just as often when she writes about the old Highland tales, and she frequently confuses Viking and Irish stories with the tradition of the Gael. [...] If she would give her real name, and patronymic, it would be seen that she has no authority or right to come before us as a Highland woman. This would ruin her reputation. For that reason we will never ever hear who Fiona MacLeod really is!

Chapter 6

6/p. 187:

Many words are going out of use; many place-names will be lost for ever if someone does not collect them, and write them down systematically. [...] New words must be

formed for the opportunity to speak in Gaelic on any subject that can be addressed or written about in other languages.

6/p. 201:

The Professor said to me that it was my duty, both to the Islands and to the Gaels.
Mrs Watson gave me the same advice before that.

Chapter 7

7/p. 219:

The land where the heroic young men, always stood up for their rights.

7/p. 220:

Although my voice has weakened
And it is a while since I left the district
I will make a Gaelic verse for you
About Mary [daughter of] Hugh's tartan.

[...]

I am here tonight amongst the Gaels
My spirit warm towards my homeland
That I will give you special advice
About Mary Hugh's tartan.

[...]

When I remember Wallace
Red-haired Robert and Douglas
Who defended our land from bondage
Wearing Mary Hugh's tartan.

7/p. 220, note 39:

‘Lament for Rob Roy Macgregor’

You were the hawk of the people, referred to as Red-haired Rob, a plaid wrapped around and a sword suit you well.

7/p. 233:

She was tall and really elegant. [...] She was wearing a green gown with a train on it, and she arrived just as if she was a real queen, much more like a queen than Victoria was. [...] And her husband was with her that night. He accompanied her onto the platform. [...] And the first song I heard her sing that night was ‘Mo Dhachaigh’. She was just wonderful. I do not remember what other songs she sang, but I will never forget hearing her sing ‘Mo Dhachaigh’.

Chapter 8

8/p. 246:

She sang Gaelic songs in the presence of Queen Victoria at Balmoral. That gave a great boost and honour to Gaelic songs in those days. Gaelic folks were grateful then for any benefit like that, or for anything at all that would attract the attention of the government towards Gaelic and its music.

8/p. 247:

Since that day until this, although [An Comunn] is womanly and modest enough, its manliness, its strength and its bravery have gone. It now has more regard and respect for the gown than it has for the kilt. And the effect is clear to see. Just as Samson lost his strength as a result of women’s trickery and deceit, it is the same with An Comunn.

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